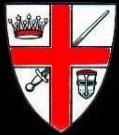


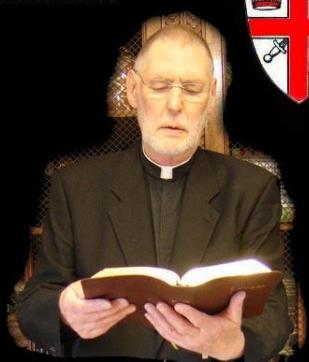


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Berea Bible Handbook – Part Fourteen Letters of Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians Research and Study by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Ancient Rome



The ancient Roman Empire spanned the time period from about 145 B.C. to 476 A.D. At its peak, centred on Rome, and connected by a vast system of Roman

Roads, it was one of the most extensive and powerful in all human history. Roman Legions conquered and ruled a vast region throughout northern Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

Jesus Christ lived His entire human life under the Roman empire, the first half under Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), who reigned when He was born in Bethlehem, the second half under Tiberius (Luke 3:1) (a statue of Tiberius is seen in the photograph below), when He still lived at Nazareth in Galilee, before moving to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, until His Crucifixion at Calvary in Jerusalem.

Roman Emperors in the New Testament

1. Augustus (Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus)

- Born at Rome on September 23 63 B.C.
- Died at Nola in Campania on August 19 14 A.D. at age 77 from an illness
- Reigned 41 years, from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D.
- Augustus was the first Roman emperor, a grand-nephew of Julius Caesar. He reigned at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:1).

2. Tiberius (Tiberius Caesar Augustus)

- Born at Rome on November 16 42 B.C.
- Died at Misenum on March 16 37 A.D. at age 79 from being smothered with a pillow while on his death bed from a terminal illness (he wasn't dying fast enough for his successor's liking)
- Reigned 23 years, from 14 to 37 A.D.
- Tiberius was emperor at the time of the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Luke 3:1)

3. Caligula (Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus)

- Born at Antium (Anzio) on August 31 12 A.D.
- Died at Rome on January 24 41 A.D. at age 19 from assassination
- Reigned 4 years, from 37 to 41 A.D.

4. Claudius (Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus)

- Born at Lugdunum on August 1 10 B.C.
- Died at Rome on October 13 54 A.D. at age 64 from eating deliberately poisoned mushrooms given to him by his wife Agrippina (Nero's mother).
- Reigned 13 years, from 41 to 54 A.D.

5. Nero (Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus)

- Born at Antium (Anzio) on December 15 37 A.D.
- Died at Rome on June 9 68 A.D. at age 31 from suicide
- Reigned 14 years, from 54 to 68 A.D.
- An insane tyrant, he set the Great Fire of Rome in 64 A.D. and persecuted Christians terribly. Paul, Peter, and many thousands of others were martyred during his reign.

6. Galba (Servius Galba Imperator Caesar Augustus)

- Born near Tarracina on December 24 3 B.C.
- Died at Rome on January 15 69 A.D. at age 72 from assassination during a rebellion among his rivals
- Reigned 1 year, from 68 to 69 A.D.

7. Otho (Imperator Marcus Otho Caesar Augustus)

- Born at Ferentium on April 28 32 A.D.
- Died at Brixellum on April 16 69 A.D. at age 37 from suicide
- Reigned less than a year, during 69 A.D.

8. Vitellius (Aulus Vitellius Germanicus Imperator Augustus)

- Born on September 7 12 A.D. (birthplace uncertain)
- Died at Rome on December 20 69 A.D. at age 57 from assassination during the Flavian Revolt, his body was dumped into the Tiber River
- Reigned less than a year, during 69 A.D.

9. Vespasian (Imperator Caesar Vespasianus Augustus)

- Born at Falacrinae on November 17 9 A.D.
- Died in Rome on June 23 79 A.D. at age 70 of illness
- Reigned 10 years, from 69 to 79 A.D.

10. Titus (Imperator Titus Caesar Vespasianus Augustus)

- Born at Rome on December 30 39 A.D.
- Died at Aquae Cutiliae on September 13 81 A.D. at age 42 of illness, possibly malaria
- Reigned 2 years, from 79 to 81 A.D.

- Before becoming emperor, he was the commander of the Roman forces that conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple in 70 A.D. precisely as prophesied by Jesus Christ 40 years before (Matthew 24:1-2).

11. Domitian (Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus)

- Born at Rome on October 24 51 A.D.
- Died at Rome on September 18 96 A.D. at age 45 from assassination by his own household staff
- Reigned 15 years, from 81 to 96 A.D.
- During Domitian's reign John was exiled on the island of Patmos where he wrote the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:9)

Unlike the other empires (Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek) that affected the course of events of The Holy Bible, the Roman empire isn't done yet. Although the ancient Roman empire "fell" long ago, it didn't die - it's going to make a *big* come-back. But then, *so is Jesus Christ*. See what "The Rock Of Ages" is prophesied to do with Daniel's Statue and its "Feet Of Iron And Clay."

Now the apostle Paul had planned the return to Jerusalem to be only an interlude in a larger mission. Already he had his eyes on a greater goal than any of the cities that he had evangelised previously. Rome beckoned him, for he was a citizen of the empire. If he but only could reach Rome with the gospel, it could easily be disseminated to all parts of the empire, for all roads led to Rome.

With true missionary statesman ship he laid out his course of action. Luke says that "after these things were ended (the ministry at Ephesus), Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21).

It is very important that a student of the book of Romans understand the book's background and history. Without that background, it will be difficult to know what Paul is saying. Paul was writing to a certain group of Christians at a certain time for a certain reason. He knew that reason would help us greatly in our study too.

In our imaginations, we must go back in time to Rome and become members of the church group there. Then, as first-century church members, we need to listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him at that time.

Written a long time ago, the book also has timely messages for God's people today, in every land and in almost every situation. We need to listen prayerfully to the words written here and use those words in our lives.

Romans 1:3-7,16,17 contain many seemingly obvious counter-imperial messages. Jesus is described as being God's son, from a long and ancient royal family who claims obedience from all the nations, and has power to match. In vs 16,17 Paul goes onto say that this is the 'gospel of God to salvation' and that the righteousness/justice (*dikaiosynē*) of God has been revealed. Whilst Caesar is never mentioned the implications are clear since the readers, being romans, would understand that the emperor was the son of god, came from a royal family bringing a gospel of power, justice and salvation, and demanding the allegiance of all nations. In this short passage Paul is saying that the Caesar is taking the titles and attributes that rightfully belong to the Messiah.

Romans 8:18-23 speaks about how creation is waiting for its glorious liberation from the 'bondage of corruption.' Whilst again using imperial terminology (sons of God, glorious, liberty), the inference is clear that despite the so called salvation bought by the Emperor and his empire the world is still subjected to futility. Paul is really saying that the 'glories' of the Roman Empire amount to futility. In modern parlance he is saying 'don't believe the hype.'

Romans 13:1-7 is traditionally taken as Paul supporting centre right obedience to authority and acceptance of what we might consider societal evils for the sake of a 'quietest theology.' It must be remembered that we cannot look back with our simple, dualistic mind-set, since Jewish and early Christian people could, as Wright says, 'play at both ends of the spectrum at the same time' as evidenced by Daniel both subverting and serving the ruler of Babylon.

It is important to realise that this passage is in fact severely diminishing the power that Caesar would have taken to himself as Paul starts by writing '...there is no authority except from God.' (vs 1) Under Paul's covenantal theology evil rulers, especially those who persecute God's people, will be judged but without rulers the world's political systems dissolve into chaos. We see this in recent events around the world where stable, and 'despotic' leadership has been removed. Paul appears to be reminding Jesus' followers that they are not exempt from the day to day structures of everyday life, a point which might have escaped some of the more 'overexcited' early Christians who perhaps thought that since they had a new *Kyrios*, they need not obey the old one. On the other hand we have already seen that taken as a whole, Paul's theology suggests that the Christians must live under Caesar, whilst giving allegiance to the new saviour and Lord, a situation that could clearly lead to conflict.

Background of Romans

In preparation for this next step in his missionary enterprise, he wrote the Epistle to the Romans. It was sent from Corinth, which is the traditional view, or from Philippi, just prior to sailing for Troas, for Paul states in its closing chapters that he had concluded his preaching as far as Illyricum (Rom. 15:19), that he had in hand the offering that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had taken for the poor at Jerusalem (15:26), and that he was on the eve of sailing to Jerusalem to deliver it (15:25). He expected that his presence in Judea might not be well received by some, but he intended to return shortly in order to visit Rome, and even to go to Spain (15:24, 28, 32). Granting that Romans 16 is an integral part of the epistle, it was sent to Rome by Phoebe, a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea, who was travelling in that direction (16:1).

. Paul had numerous friends at Rome. He had tried frequently to visit them, but had been hindered (15:22; 1:13) on each occasion. The church could not have been a large one and probably it consisted chiefly of Gentiles, since in addressing them he classed them as Gentiles (1:13), and since the later account of his visit to Rome as given by Acts indicates ignorance concerning Christian truth on the part of the Jews. They had heard of the movement, but had not investigated it for themselves, nor had any others reported to them about it (Acts 28:21). The Gentile church of Rome had in it a small minority of Jews at the most; and the Jews who lived in Rome, having come to the city since the expulsion under Claudius, had not made the acquaintance of those who were in the church.

The origin of the church in Rome is unknown. There were present at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost "sojourners from Rome" (2:10) who may have returned with the message of Christ. Aquila and Priscilla had come from Rome, and, according to Romans 16:3, had returned there. No hint is given in the New Testament that Peter had anything to do with the founding of this church. It seems to have begun spontaneously among believers, the majority of whom had probably migrated to Rome from other parts of the world.

Paul had several reasons for being interested in this church. His desire to see the imperial city, the need of the Christians for instruction, his wish to forestall any Judaizing activity in a group of great potential importance, and his hope of support from them as he undertook a tour to Spain (Rom. 15:24)—all contributed to his resolve to spend some time with them.

Romans was written as a substitute for immediate personal contact and as a preparation for making the Roman church a missionary center comparable to Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, and the other cities where Paul had labored. Romans, therefore, unlike Corinthians, is not devoted so much to the correction of errors

as to the teaching of truth. Although it does not comprise all the fields of Christian thought—eschatology is notably lacking in its content—it does give a fuller and more systematic view of the heart of Christianity than any other of Paul's epistles, with the possible exception of Ephesians. Most of the Pauline epistles are controversial or corrective in nature; Romans is chiefly didactic.

Content

The central theme of Romans is the revelation of the righteousness of God to man, and its application to his spiritual need. Its theme is thus basic to all Christian experience, for man cannot do business with God until a proper approach has been established. The epistle is directed particularly to Gentiles. Paul stated that he was an apostle to the Gentiles (1:5); he sketched the religious history of the Gentile world as the prelude to revelation (1:18-32); he asserted that God's salvation is for "Gentiles also" (3:29) and that there is "no distinction" between Jew and Greek in the way of faith. Romans avers that salvation is universal in its scope.

The development of this theme of the righteousness of God can best be seen in the outline.

Outline

Now in Christ all that finds its full and complete answer. The Son of God, by whom all were created, has Himself come in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, by offering Himself a sacrifice for sin, has completely vindicated God's righteousness, while revealing His love. At the same time the man, or order of man, that has sinned against God has been judicially removed by His death from before the eye of God, so that God can present Himself to man in grace.

The moral perfection of the offerer of necessity brought in resurrection, in which all the pleasure of God's grace in regard to man is set forth in righteousness; and Christ risen is the deliverer who is to come forth from Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Thus God's faithfulness to His covenant is established in Zion. God is proved to be faithful and righteous: we have here the first elements of the knowledge of God.

But it may be desirable to open up the epistle a little in detail. After the introduction, in which the fact may be noticed that the glad tidings are said to be concerning God's Son, a picture is given us of the moral condition of man in the world, whether heathen, philosopher, or Jew. In the heathen we see the unchecked development of sin (chap.1.) In the philosopher the fact that light in itself does not control evil (chap. 2); and in the Jew that law is proved to be powerless to bring about subjection to God, or to secure righteousness for man.

The conclusion is that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God—all are proved to be justly under the sentence and judgment of death which God had imposed at the outset. Chap 3.

In the latter part of chap. 3. we have the declaration of God's righteousness, in regard of man's state, in the blood of Christ, who on the cross took vicariously the place of man, and suffered what was due to man: God's righteousness is thus witnessed to, both in respect of past forbearance and present grace ; and His consequent attitude towards all men, without difference, is seen ; while chap. 4. shows that the principle of justifying man, or accounting him righteous apart from works, had been conspicuous in regard to the men to whom in time past God had made promises, namely, Abraham and David. This was and is the pleasure of God, as now set forth in our Lord Jesus, who has been delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. While God had Himself been glorified in Christ's death, His pleasure as to man is set forth in Christ's resurrection.

Chap. 5. brings fully into view the dominion of grace established through our Lord Jesus Christ, and unfolds in detail the terms on which God is with these who have been justified in His grace, beginning with peace and going on to reconciliation, the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. The subject is brought to a conclusion at the close of the chapter by the unfolding of the position of Christ as the last Adam ; and of the effects of His moral perfectness in not only removing all that had come in by the sin of the first man Adam, but, in bringing in the justification of life. The hearing of this is that, for God, but one typical Man subsists, and that what attaches to Him as such belongs to those who are morally of His line or order. This principle was true in Adam, and is now true in Christ. In Christ the question of good and evil has been solved; death has been annulled, and the blessing of eternal life brought into view.

The righteousness of God having been vindicated, and the truth brought out of what His mind is towards believers, the three following chapters take up the question of the state of the believer, and develop the di vineyly established way of deliverance for him from principles to which man's soul is naturally in bondage; that thus he may be responsive to the love in which it has pleased God to make Himself known, and may be brought into the sense of being the object of God's purpose.

There are three principles to which man is in bondage, namely, sin, the law, and the flesh ; and a way has been opened by which the believer may be free from the control of each of these principles. As to *sin*, the dominating principle in the world (chap. 6), the way of deliverance is indicated in baptism, in identification

with the death of Christ ; and freedom is found in realising the truth of that which is set forth in baptism, that is, in reckoning ourselves dead indeed to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. The knowledge which the soul has acquired of God in grace enables it to take this ground.

As regards *law* (chap.7), the bond, where it existed, has been dissolved in the death of Christ, so that Christ who is risen from the dead should be law to the believer ; hence he lives by the faith of the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him.

As regards *flesh*, which is found to be hopelessly perverse, deliverance is in the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (chap. viii.). This is the power within the believer, and the consequences of it are momentous. It involves, in the consciousness of the believer's soul, the transfer from one stock to another. He is not only transplanted, but grafted into Christ, so that he acquires all the nourishment and vigour of the new stock. Thus he is led into the consciousness of all that is involved in the Spirit that dwells within him ; and is able more distinctly to accept the position of death to sin, and to appreciate the truth of Christ being law to him—and in the enjoyment of deliverance he has the consciousness by the Spirit of that to which God has called him, namely, to be conformed to the image of His Son, and the persuasion that nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We now arrive at another section of the epistle, which includes chapters 9, 10, and 11, the object of which would appear to be to vindicate the faithfulness of God as to His promises to the fathers, in face of the fact of Israel having been set aside to make way for the church. It is shown that the principle of sovereignty lay underneath the whole of God's dealings in regard to Israel, and was expressed in the *way* of election, and of rejection at critical points in their history, and that the position of Israel had been formed on this. A crucial test had come in by the presentation of Christ, and Israel had stumbled at the stumbling scone; and, while saving a remnant, God had in His sovereignty also called an election from the Gentiles, who had submitted to the righteousness of God which Israel had refused. In this connection the apostle vindicates his world-wide gospel.

God had not, however, given up finally His thought in regard to Israel, for even in the gospel to the Gentiles He had them ultimately in view. The nations had now by the gospel their opportunity, and if they failed to continue in the goodness of God, their defection would make the way for the resumption of God's ways with Israel ; and both Gentiles and Jews would manifestly come in on the ground of mercy. Thus God would be everything, and man nothing. This result calls forth the doxology at the close of chap. 11.

Thus we have in the epistle a full vindication of God, both as to righteousness and faithfulness.

The hortatory part of the epistle follows in chapters 12-15. The compassions of God are urged as an incentive to the believer to be here for the will of God. Transformed by the renewing of his mind, he is to be here in anticipation of another age. This is to be seen both in his service and, morally, in his character. His obligation is then shown in respect of the powers allowed of God in the world, and of man generally ; and then in respect of the kingdom of God, by the influence of which he is to be ruled in his conduct toward those weak in the faith.

The apostle closes by a reference to the distinctiveness of his own service, carrying out his special mission to the Gentiles—and the expression of his purpose in due course to reach Rome.

The salutations at the close of the epistle are remarkable for the number of persons mentioned by name, and for the touches by which they are individually identified.

The epistle was written by Paul when at Corinth, about A. D. 58 : cf. Acts 20: 1-3. It is an exhaustive dissertation, and evinces the energy and wisdom of the Spirit of God in each point discussed. It is apposite that such an epistle should have been addressed- to the saints at the then metropolis of the civilised world, not, however, that that metropolis should be in any way a centre of the church of God. Paul had not introduced the gospel there, and there is no evidence that Peter did so. It may have been carried to that city by some who were converted at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Outline in Detail

1. Opening Remarks

The four gospels display the great mystery of godliness, and the coming of the Son of God on earth to accomplish the work of redemption. While the Acts of the Apostles shows the beginning of the Church, the 21 epistles of the New Testament bring out the marvellous results of Christ's work and the revelation of God's love in Him.

The Apostle Paul first reveals salvation through faith in Christ, which secures forgiveness of sins and justification, together with deliverance from sin (Romans). He shows further the Christian before God, as dead and risen again with Christ (Col. 3:1), placed in the position of a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). He also speaks about the Church as an habitation and the house of God on earth, the

body and spouse of Christ. His ‘doctrine’ (2 Tim. 3:10) rests upon four foundation truths, which Christ in glory gave His dear apostle in direct revelations:

1. The Church is Christ’s body (Eph. 3:6).
2. The Lord’s supper as the memorial of His death and emblematic of the oneness of His (spiritual) body, the expression ‘the Christ’ speaking of Christ together with His Church (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:23; 12:12).
3. The first resurrection of believers asleep in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3).
4. The rapture of the saints at the Lord’s coming (1 Cor. 15:51).

Paul’s writings present the order which becomes God’s house (1 Cor. 1-9; 1 Tim.), together with the special provisions of grace when the Christian testimony is in ruins (2 Tim). The Church, Christ’s body, is nourished by spiritual gifts sent by the glorified Head in heaven (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7-16). The four epistles dated from the apostle’s first captivity in Rome are of special value for our hearts. Therein, the great apostle of the nations reveals God’s eternal counsels (Ephesians and Colossians), while not forgetting the condition of a fugitive slave (Philemon). Paul – a simple servant of Jesus Christ – declares also what His master was for his heart – his life, his example, his goal, his joy and his strength (Philippians). This is precisely what He should be for us too.

John’s epistles show the revelation of God the Father (light and love) in His Son, who is eternal life. Believers are the Father’s children in His heavenly family. According to God’s own witness: ‘He that hath the Son hath the life’ (John 3:15-16; 1 John 5:12). Christ – grace and truth – is in the believer. That which was true in Him on earth is now true in us (1 John 2:8). When the foundations are destroyed (Ps. 11:3), stability rests securely upon the person of Christ, and the testimony of the truth is of all importance (2 and 3 John).

The catholic or general epistles (James’s, Peter’s and Jude’s) together with the epistle to the Hebrews consider the Christian as a pilgrim on earth, having Christ as a great high priest in heaven. The future of the world and the decline of Christendom are announced. There will be a two-fold apostasy (the abandonment of the truth previously received), for it will be moral and religious (Jewish and Christian). Thus the epistles close on the promise of deliverance for the Lord’s own, the judgement of the world and the final destruction of the first creation and ungodly men.

2. Introduction of the epistle to the Romans (chapter 1:1-15)

The great purpose of the epistle is to answer the solemn question: ‘How can man be just with God?’ (Job 9:2) Therefore, the epistle develops the message of the gospel, the good news of grace and its practical results for sinful man. However, it does not show in detail the aspects of God’s thoughts towards Christ and His assembly. This vital aspect of divine truth, partially presented in the epistle to the Corinthians, is only fully revealed by the apostle’s last writings, at the time of his captivity in Rome (Ephesians and Colossians). We may say by analogy to the history of Israel, Romans considers the believer as still in the wilderness (the world), Ephesians as already in the land (the heavenly places) and Colossians as crossing the river Jordan (as dead and risen with Christ). Romans shows man’s responsibility and Ephesians the side of God’s eternal counsels. The centre of all remains Christ and His work on the cross.

A large assembly had been formed in Rome with no involvement of the apostle, but he desired greatly to visit the saints in order to preach the gospel (v. 15) to them, who were called of Jesus Christ. This gospel goes beyond the salvation of the soul by faith to include all the display of God’s purpose towards man through Christ’s work. Yet, the apostle would not visit Rome except as a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1).

3. The state of mankind before God (chapters 1:16 to 3:20)

God’s gospel concerns His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. In Him, an eternal salvation is offered by grace. The gospel of Christ is the power of God; it is presented to all men, in the irremediable state in which they all are, without exception. The gospel reveals also God’s righteousness, on the principle of faith to faith because: ‘The just shall live by faith.’

The apostle demonstrates first the state of perdition in which all mankind lies:

1. The wrath of God is revealed against the heathen. They refused the testimony of creation to God’s eternal power and Godhead (1:19-20), forgot the knowledge of God (1:21) and finally neglected the voice of their own conscience (2:14 -15). Pagan corruption has been only surpassed by that of lifeless Christianity (2 Tim. 3:2).

2. Philosophers and moralists (Jewish or pagan) are as inexcusable in their hypocrisy (2:1-16). There are as many of these in to-day’s world as there were in the Greek world. Like the Pharisees in the Lord’s time, they were (and still are)

ready to teach lessons to others, but not do likewise and even take pleasure in them that do evil.

3. The people of Israel, whose privileges were so great, but who are guilty of transgressing the law and blaspheming the name of their God (2:17-29).

While man (Jewish or not) may raise all sorts of objections (3:1-8), the terrible display of man's guilt and ruin is complete. Six scriptures from the Old Testament (five from the Psalms and one from Isaiah) confirm man's lost state in regard to his inner attitude, his words, his works and his general behaviour (v. 10-18) 'that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified' (v.19-20).

4. Forgiveness of sins and justification (chapters 3:21 - 5:11)

'But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested' (v.21). After the long parenthesis, which declares man's guilt (1:18 to 3:20), God's answer is proclaimed: a free salvation, founded on Christ's propitiatory work offered by God's righteousness. It is 'unto all' (offered to all men), but is only 'upon all them that believe' (imputed only to believers). Those who believe are justified by means of faith through God's grace. Salvation is not for Jews only, but available to all on the basis of a moral rule or principle that works constantly to produce the same results. Using the example of the Old Testament saints (Abraham and David), the apostle goes on to show the place of justification by faith in relation to works, circumcision, promises and the power of resurrection, particularly that of Christ (ch. 4).

1. Faith and works (vs. 1-8): Abraham, called the father of all believers, has been justified by means of faith without works. However, works are essential to prove the reality of faith (James 2: 21-24). Salvation remains a free gift, not a reward.

2. Faith and circumcision (vs. 9-12): Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6) 14 years before circumcision was given to him as a sign of separation from the world to God. Circumcision is the seal of righteousness (v. 11), and Abraham became the father of circumcision (v. 12), the head of the company, to all those separated from the world to God.

3. Faith and the promise (vs. 13-16): Abraham received unconditional promises from God solely dependant upon God's faithfulness, a long time before the gift of the law to Israel.

4. Faith and resurrection (vs. 17-22): finally, promises are founded upon the power of the God of resurrection.

In conclusion, ‘Jesus our Lord … was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification’ (vs. 24-25). The faith of believers is founded on the blood of Christ (3:25) and His resurrection (4:25).

The consequences of this first doctrinal part of the epistle are triumphant. The believer owns and enjoys:

1. Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (peace of conscience),
2. The grace of God (His favour),
3. The hope of the glory of God,
4. Joy in sufferings (tribulation, patience, experience, hope),
5. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost,
6. Reconciliation to God and salvation, and finally waits for
7. The glory of God in Christ.

So Christ’s work is toward us for the forgiveness and justification of God concerning our sins. The gospel, therefore, answers God’s second question to Cain: ‘What hast thou done?’(Gen. 4:10).

5. Deliverance from sin (chapters 5:12 to 8:39)

The epistle goes on to address the divine answer to the question God asked man (Adam) in the garden: ‘Where art thou?’ (Gen. 3:9). The subject now is sin, the source of evil in us, rather than the sins or evil acts we have committed. The answer to this is deliverance.

5.1 Sin in the believer (ch. 5:12-21)

Although Adam ‘is the figure of him that was to come’ (v. 14), Christ, the apostle sets out the contrast between the first man (Adam) and the second man (Christ, the last Adam). Both are the head of a company: Adam’s is the natural human family, Christ’s the heavenly family. The members of these families manifest the moral characteristics of their respective heads:

- disobedience, sin (and offences), death and condemnation in the case of Adam,
- obedience and righteousness, life (eternal), grace and justification in the case of Christ.

Once bound to Adam by birth in this world, believers are now bound to Christ. Now, for them, grace reigns ‘through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord’ (v. 21).

5.2 Flesh in the believer (ch. 6)

The believer is delivered from the bondage of sin because he is ‘dead to sin’ (vs. 10-11) and identified with Christ in His death. This is the moral import of Christian baptism (v.4). Henceforth, the Christian lives practically for Christ, showing the characters of His life: a new life which produces acceptable fruits for God here below in a walk of practical holiness. The ‘old man’ is crucified (V.6) and the believer is called upon to keep the flesh (which still dwells in him) in the place of death. There are three moral steps to this, exemplified by the apostle himself:

1. ‘For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth’ (Col. 3:3, 5).
2. ‘Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom. 6:11).
3. ‘Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body’ (2 Cor. 4:10).

5.3 The law and the believer (ch. 7)

Believers are also dead to the law (of Moses). The value of the law is not in question; it revealed man’s state but without bringing any remedy. Now the believer is practically made free (like a slave bought by his master) from the authority of the law because his death with Christ has broken the obligation he once had to it. A conflict will continue within the Christian as long as he struggles alone with himself. Jesus Christ, the great Liberator, answers the distress of his soul to make him grasp the reality of deliverance. The apostle shows successively:

1. Deliverance from the law is through death (that of the believer, not of the law) (vs. 1-6).

2. Knowledge of sin is by the law (vs. 7-13).
3. The state and experience of a soul who is not yet made free (vs. 14-23). The apostle identifies himself with this soul to demonstrate:
 - a) no good thing dwells in the flesh (v. 18),
 - b) there is a difference between ourselves and the sin that is in us and, finally,
 - c) there is no strength in us to do these things.
4. We need the help of another, Christ as we are unable to deliver ourselves. But also that nothing needs to be done, because Christ's work is complete.

5.4 Deliverance and blessings (ch. 8)

The conclusions of the second doctrinal part of the epistle are as triumphant as those of the first. Delivered from sin, the flesh and the law, we Christians taste the glorious liberty of God's children. The Holy Spirit in us is life and power.

1. As Spirit of life, He makes us free from all bondage (the epistle to the Galatians deals specifically with deliverance from the world, sin, flesh and law).
2. He energises our spiritual lives (v. 10).
3. He leads us, showing that we are sons of God (vs. 14-15; Gal. 5:18). Sonship speaks of our privileges and responsibilities that result from adoption.
4. He bears witness that we are children of God (v. 16). As children we partake of the divine nature and share divine affections.
5. The firstfruits of the Spirit are the witness of our final deliverance.
6. The Spirit helps our infirmities (v. 26).
7. Finally, while we groan within ourselves (v. 23) in the midst of a groaning creation (v. 22), He makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (v. 26). And Christ also makes intercession for us (v. 34).

In the midst of suffering, we are strengthened by the hope of the glory to come. We are perfectly safe as objects of the love of God and Christ from which no creature or anything else can ever separate us (v. 39).

This marvellous chapter contains a brief reference to the eternal counsels of God concerning His beloved Son, the firstborn among many brethren (vs. 29-30). The believers are presented as:

1. Foreknown
2. Predestinated to be conformed to the image of the son of God
3. Called
4. Justified
5. Already glorified as far as the purpose of God is concerned.

6. Israel and the gospel (chapters 9-11)

An important question remained to be settled in relation to the gospel, now offered to all men whether Jews or from the nations. How was it possible to reconcile this message of salvation to all with the particular promises made previously by God to His people, Israel?

6.1 Chapter 9

The position of the Jews with regard to God and His gospel proceeds from three general truths:

1. God is sovereign. While He owes nothing to men, He will accomplish the desire of His will according to the election of grace, as shown by the examples of Isaac and Jacob.
2. God endures with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (v. 22), like Pharaoh.
3. The riches of God's glory are made known upon vessels of mercy, we who are believers.

6.2 Chapter 10

On account of disobedience, Israel has lost all rights to the promises. Consequently, they shall be blessed only on the ground of grace. Salvation is by faith in the Word of God received in the heart and confirmed by the mouth in confession (v.10). Because Israel has rejected God's testimony, a veil is now placed upon their heart (2 Cor. 3:14-16).

6.3 Chapter 11

However, God has not rejected Israel, and the apostle brings forward three proofs of this:

1. His own case: he was a Jew and yet an object of God's grace. There remains a remnant according to the election of grace. This was confirmed by the example of Elijah and the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (vs. 1-10).
2. God's purpose was to use the nations to awaken Israel's conscience, and not to reject His people [5] (vs. 11-24).
3. God's ways were a mystery, that of blessing Israel, after it been set aside for a time (vs. 25-31).

Finally, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (v. 29). While all men are concluded in unbelief (disobedience), mercy is offered to all 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' (v. 33).

7. Practical exhortations and the apostle's ministry (chapters 12-15)

The exhortations are based on the epistle's doctrine and have their source in divine compassions. Christians belong to Christ and are called to offer themselves to God. Separation from the world (in walk) and humility (in heart) will enable them to know the good, acceptable and perfect will of God so as to please Him (ch. 12:1-4).

The gifts of grace are given to the Assembly (Christ's body on earth) to maintain practical links between believers (as members of that body). The exhortations that spring from this cover all the activities of Christians in their mutual relations (12:9-16, except v. 14) and contact with the world (12:17-21). The apostle's encouragements start with love and end with overcoming evil with good (ch. 12:5-21). The gifts of grace and the exhortations stand in particular relation to one another (see Appendix B).

Christians are also exhorted to submit to the authorities because of wrath (they have a responsibility towards human authorities as citizens) and because of conscience (they have a responsibility towards God as Christian). The supreme reason is love, a debt each Christian has towards God that nothing should quench (ch. 13:1-10). Time is short before the Lord comes; it is high time to awake out of sleep, to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, in expectation of the eternal day (ch. 13:11-14).

Christian liberty is expounded in regard to responsibilities towards others and the consideration due to them. Christ is the perfect example of devotion and self-sacrifice. As we are occupied with Him, we will realise the moral characteristics of the kingdom of God in our lives: righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Specifically, we will be guarded against the dangers of laxity and legalism in respect of the conscience of our brother ‘for whom Christ died’ (chs. 14 to 15:7).

God is a God of Hope, for the Jews as well as for the nations. The Apostle Paul had preached the gospel in the whole Greek world. He was now uncertain as to what would be the continuation of his service in the Latin world (Italy and western Europe, including Spain). However, the God of peace would remain with him, as with us also.

8. Greetings and conclusion of the epistle (chapter 16)

The many greetings that conclude the epistle show the link of affection between the apostle and the saints in Rome whom he had never seen except a few of them. Paul associates all the assemblies in Asia in his greetings (v. 1-16; 21-24).

Vigilance was required towards those that troubled the assembly by strange doctrines. They needed to be, ‘wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil’ until the God of peace bruised Satan under their feet (v.19-20).

The epistle has shown the gospel of God and its practical results for sinful man. The cross of Christ answers perfectly to man’s responsibility before God. The truth of salvation by faith has been placed in relation to the successive dispensations of God in His dealings towards man on earth (promise, law etc.). However, the apostle could not close his letter without mentioning what he calls the mystery, the mystery *par excellence*: God’s purpose of uniting His redeemed ones of the Church (Jews or from the nations) in one body to Christ. Mentioned already in 1 Corinthians, this mystery was to be fully revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome.

Gazing at the unsearchable marvels of the gospel and the eternal counsels of God, the apostle closes with a doxology to the only wise God. To Him, through Jesus Christ, be glory for ever!

Appendix A

The two families of Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:15-21)

Adam	Christ
1. Offence and gift of grace (v. 15)	
Through the offence of one many be dead	Grace and gift abound unto many
2. Condemnation and justification (v. 16)	
Judgement by one to condemnation	Free gift unto justification
3. Reign of death and life (v. 17)	
Death reigns	Believers reign in life
4. Bearing of the act (v. 18)	
By the offence of one, condemnation upon all men	By the righteousness of one, justification of life (eternal) towards all men
5. Disobedience (sinners) and obedience (righteous) (v. 19)	
By one man's disobedience many were made sinners	By the obedience of one many shall be made righteous
6. Measure of sin and grace (v. 20)	
Offence and sin abound	Grace overabounds
7. Reigns of sin and grace (v. 21)	
Sin has reigned unto death	Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life
8. Salvation of the soul (Rom. 6:23)	
The wages of sin is death	The gift of God is eternal life
9. Salvation of the body (Rom. 7:24; 8:11)	
Who shall deliver me out of this body of death?	(God) shall quicken your mortal bodies

Conclusion: ‘There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus’
(Rom. 8:1).

Appendix B

Gifts of grace and practical exhortations (chapters 12:6-21)

Gift	Exhortations			Vs.
	a)	b)	c)	
1. Prophecy	Love without dissimulation	Brotherly love	Honour to one another	9,10
2. Ministry	Not slothful in business	Fervent in spirit	Serving the Lord	11
3. Teaching	Rejoicing in hope	Patience in	Continuing in	12

			tribulation	prayer	
4. Exhortation	Doing good	Hospitality	Blessing others		13,14
5. Giving	Fellowship in joy	Fellowship in weeping	Fellowship in the same mind		15,16
6. Rule (with diligence)	Humility in thoughts	Humility in action	Humility in spirit		16
7. Mercy (with cheerfulness)	Absence of vengeance	Honest behaviour	Searching for peace		17-20

Conclusion: good overcomes evil (v.21)

Note: The first six exhortations (verses 9 to 16 except v. 14) address relations between Christians. The last exhortations (verses 17 to 21) cover the relations of saints with the world.

The Scriptures present Christ, as Son of God:

1. In past eternity (Ps. 2:7; Heb. 1:5)
2. At His birth in the world (Lk. 1:35)
3. At the beginning of His ministry, at John's baptism (Matt. 3.17)
4. At the end of His ministry, on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:5)
5. At His death, according to the testimony of the centurion (Matt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39)
6. By His resurrection (Rom. 1:4)

1. In future eternity (Heb. 7:28)

1. This declaration of the prophet (Hab. 2:4) is found three times in the N.T., with the emphasis successively on the just (Rom. 1:17), life (Heb. 10:38) and faith (Gal. 3:11)
2. Propitiation defines the act of covering sin on the basis of a sacrifice. In the tabernacle, the golden propitiatory (the mercy seat) was the cover of the ark (precious symbol of Christ). The blood of the sin offering was placed upon it, a figure of Christ's blood which makes atonement for sin.

3. The word ‘law’ is used as in scientific language. For example, the law of gravity.

4. God’s government on earth is compared to an olive tree (v.24). The root and the trunk represent Abraham who had received God’s promises. Israel is represented by the branches. God is the source of fatness and fruit. He grafts the nations into the olive tree in order to bless them and Israel.

Commentary on Romans

Foreword

Just how the message about Jesus Christ first reached Rome is not explicitly revealed in the biblical account. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, Jews and proselytes from various parts of the Greco-Roman world heard Peter’s testimony. Among them were persons from Rome. (Acts 2:9-11) It is likely that a number of them believed what they heard, were among the some 3,000 who were then baptized, and, in time, returned to the city. (Acts 2:41)

The book of Acts indicates that it was common for Jews and others to travel extensively throughout the Roman Empire. Apollos, for example, came to Ephesus (the ruins of which city are located on what is now the western coast of Turkey) from Alexandria in Egypt and later headed for Corinth in Greece. (Acts 18:24, 27; 19:1)

Many of the believers in Rome at the time Paul wrote his letter may have become disciples in other cities and later either returned or moved to the capital of the empire. Evidence to this effect is that Paul personally knew quite a number of the believers in Rome even though he had never visited there. (Romans 16:3-15) Among those whom he knew were Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca). When Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, this Jewish couple moved to Corinth, where Paul met them, worked with them in the same trade, and lived with them. (Acts 18:1-3) They appear already to have been believers, for no reference is made to their coming to believe in Jesus Christ through Paul’s ministry. When the apostle wrote his letter to the Romans, Aquila and Priscilla were again residing in Rome, for the decree of Claudius had ceased to be in force and Nero was then ruling.

As the case of Aquila and Priscilla illustrates, believing Jews, proselytes, and God fearers continued to go to the synagogues and used the opportunity to share the message about Christ with others. After Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos at the synagogue in Ephesus speak boldly about Jesus, they assisted him to gain a better understanding about the Son of God. Apollos, though well-versed in the

holy writings, only knew about the baptism of John and so needed to learn more. (Acts 18:24-26) Jewish believers continued to live according to the requirements of the law, observing the Sabbath, adhering to the dietary restrictions, and faithfully conducting themselves according to other legal requirements. (Acts 21:20-24) So their life as believers was markedly different from that of non-Jewish Christians.

During the period the decree of Claudius was in effect, the community of believers in Rome would have consisted of non-Jews. After the Jews were allowed to return and Jewish believers did so, non-Jewish believers may have outnumbered their Jewish brothers and sisters. These developments may have contributed toward later problems in living harmoniously as an integrated congregation of Christians. Based on his experience with Jewish and non-Jewish Christians and the information fellow believers who were then living in Rome had earlier shared with him, Paul, under the guidance of God's spirit, could write a letter well-suited to their needs. One of those needs appears to have been for all of them to increase in their appreciation for one another as part of a united, loving community of believers.

Internal evidence in the letter itself and specifics in the book of Acts make it possible to establish the place and the approximate time Paul dictated his letter to the Romans. Phoebe, who was heading for Rome from Cenchreae, appears to have been the one to whom the apostle entrusted the letter for delivery. (Romans 16:1) Cenchreae served as the nearby port for Corinth when shipments were made to eastern harbours. Furthermore, Paul referred to Gaius (evidently the Gaius who was from Corinth) as his host and Erastus the city steward. (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14) So it is likely that Paul was then in Corinth and planned to travel to Jerusalem to deliver a contribution from believers in Macedonia and Greece for poverty-stricken Jewish believers in Judea. (Romans 15:25, 26, 30, 31)

During Paul's first stay in Corinth, Gallio served a term as proconsul of Achaia. An ancient fragmentary inscription from Delphi mentions Gallio and provides enough information to place his term as running either from 51 to 52 CE or from 52 to 53 CE. After Paul left Corinth, he set sail from Cenchreae for Syria, making a stopover in Ephesus and then continuing his journey to Caesarea. From there he went up to "greet the congregation" (apparently the one in Jerusalem) and then went to Syrian Antioch. Thereafter Paul continued his activity in Asia Minor, remaining over two years in Ephesus alone before returning to Greece for a three months' stay. (Acts 18:18-23; 19:8-10; 20:1-3, 31) It would appear that he then dictated his letter to the Romans, and a date of about 56 CE would fit the specifics in the biblical account.

Another line of evidence involves the time Festus became governor of Judea. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem during the time Felix occupied this position and remained confined in Caesarea for two years. (Acts 24:27) While the exact date when Festus assumed the office is not known, the range of commonly suggested dates is between 58 and 61 CE.

Romans 1: 1-32

1: 1-17 The theme – the gospel of salvation

Verses 1-6 Paul and his gospel

The apostle Paul identified himself as the writer of the letter to the Romans. (1:1) In view of his apostleship to the Gentiles, he may have chosen to go by his Roman name “Paul.” His Hebrew name “Saul” had the proud distinction of having been the name of Israel’s first king, a man of the tribe of Benjamin (as was Paul or Paulos). The Latin word *paulus* means “small” or “little,” and the Hebrew name signifies “asked for” or “asked of,” the implication being that God was the one to whom the appeal was made for a child or a son.

As a slave of “Christ Jesus” (“Jesus Christ,” in other Greek manuscripts), Paul had the honor of being in the service of the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth had been granted. (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 19:16) His call to be an apostle (one sent forth with a commission) had come directly through Jesus Christ and God the Father. (Acts 9:5, 6, 15, 16; 26:15-18; Galatians 1:1) Paul had been set apart for the “evangel of God,” designated to proclaim the glad tidings about Jesus Christ and how reconciliation to God would be possible through him. It is the “evangel” or “good news of God,” for its ultimate source is the Almighty. (1:1)

Paul could speak of the evangel or glad tidings as having been previously promised through the prophets whose words were recorded in the “holy writings.” (1:2) The prophets referred to a time when a ruler would come from the tribe of Judah, through the line of David (the son of Jesse). This one would administer affairs according to the highest standard of justice, and non-Jewish peoples would rally to him as to a signal on an elevated site. The coming of this ruler, the Messiah or Christ, would be associated with the inauguration of a new covenant through his sacrificial death, providing the basis for true forgiveness of sins and complete reconciliation with God. (Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 11:1-5, 10; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Zechariah 12:10-13:1)

As Paul continued, the good news is about God's Son, who, according to the flesh or natural descent, was of the "seed of David," being in the line that had David as the illustrious royal ancestor. (1:3)

Jesus Christ, the Lord of believers, was designated, established, or declared as "Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead." (1:4) The words "Son of God in power" may mean that, in contrast to his human existence when he was a little lower than the angels, Jesus is now in possession of the fullness of power in his exalted post-resurrection state. (Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 2:8, 9) A number of translations make this meaning explicit in their renderings. "He was appointed to be God's Son with great power by rising from the dead." (NCV) "Jesus is the powerful Son of God, because he was raised from death." (CEV)

Another possible meaning is that "in power" relates to the resurrection, which would mean that the powerful act involved in raising Jesus from the dead undeniably established his being the Son of God. This significance is conveyed in the renderings of various translations. "He was proclaimed Son of God by an act of power that raised him from the dead." (REB) J. B. Phillips paraphrased the words to mean that Jesus Christ was "patently marked out as the Son of God by the power of that Spirit of holiness which raised him to life again from the dead." In Ephesians 1:17-20, the working of God's power is specifically mentioned as having effected Christ's resurrection.

Numerous translators and commentators have considered the "spirit of holiness" to be the "holy spirit." "And Jesus Christ our Lord was shown to be the Son of God when God powerfully raised him from the dead by means of the Holy Spirit." (NLT) This rendering and others like it are questionable, because "according to [the] flesh" and "according to [the] spirit of holiness" are contrasting parallels.

It appears preferable to regard "spirit" as a contrast to "flesh" or "human nature," with "spirit" relating to Jesus' identity on the level of the spirit. A number of translations convey this meaning. "As to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death." (GNT, Second Edition) "As regards the holiness of His Spirit [he] was decisively proved by His Resurrection to be the Son of God." (Weymouth) Unlike Jesus' body of flesh, which bore the sins of humankind, the spirit does not function in the role of sin bearer and may, for this reason, be called the "spirit of holiness." (Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24)

While on the road to Damascus, Saul (Paul), intent on acting against believers in that city, had an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. At that time, the Son of God granted the persecutor Saul his grace or favour and gave him an apostleship. According to his own description to Timothy, Paul was then a blasphemer (a man who, through his extreme hostility to believers, demonstrated himself to be a person who considered Jesus Christ to be an impostor), a persecutor (one who pursued believers with violent intent, wanting to force them to recant and, if they refused to do so, to be severely punished) and an arrogant man, displaying haughtiness in waging his campaign against believers. Yet, because he acted in ignorance, he was shown mercy and granted the favor of having Jesus Christ reveal himself to him and commission him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. (1 Timothy 1:12-14)

When presenting his testimony before King Agrippa, Paul specifically referred to Jesus Christ's words when he commissioned him, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me [the things that you have seen, footnote] and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Commenting on his response to his commission, Paul continued, "After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance." (Acts 26:16-20, NRSV)

What he said in his defence before King Agrippa, Paul expressed briefly in Romans 1:5, "Through [Jesus Christ], we have received favor and an apostleship for obedience of faith in all the nations relating to his name [literally, over his name]." Although the Greek verb for "we have received" [*elábomen*] is first person plural (not first person singular), Paul is referring to himself, as evident from the mention of the apostleship with which he was entrusted. The expression "obedience of faith" could mean either the obedience prompted by faith or the obedient response in faith to the message about God's Son. In fulfilling his assignment as an apostle, Paul made Jesus Christ known and did so for the sake of Christ's name (that is, for the Son of God himself). So the final phrase "over his name" could apply to the "obedience of faith" that had Jesus Christ as the focus. Another possibility is that the reference is to the commission Paul carried out for the sake of Christ.

Among the nations, believers in Rome were “called ones of Jesus Christ.” (1:6) This could mean that they were called to belong to Jesus Christ or that he had chosen them.

Verses 7-17 Paul and his readers

All the believers “in Rome” whom Paul addressed were “beloved of God.” As God’s “sons” or “children,” they were members of his beloved family. Their calling was one to a life of holiness or purity as imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were “called to be holy ones.” (1:7)

As in other letters, Paul included the prayerful expression, “Favour to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:7) “Favour,” unmerited kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace that comes from God and Christ would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity, knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and distress.

Foremost for Paul was the giving of thanks to God. Indicative of his personal relationship, the apostle wrote “my God.” In the case of all the believers in Rome, Paul gave thanks to God through Jesus Christ because their faith had been proclaimed “in the whole world.” From the capital of the Roman Empire, news about the faith believers there had in Jesus Christ spread throughout the then-known world. (1:8)

Paul called upon God as his witness that he always remembered the believers at Rome in his prayers. The apostle spoke of his service to God as being “in the evangel of his Son” or in making known the good news respecting him and what it could mean for those who responded in faith. When saying that he served God “in [his] spirit,” Paul indicated that his service was not merely an outward expression but involved his whole being, his inner self. (1:9, 10)

Regarding believers in Rome, Paul’s supplications (his fervent appeals) focused on being able to see them if, by God’s will, somehow the way would be opened up to him to come to them. (1:10) He longed to see them, for he wanted to impart a spiritual gift to them, a gift that would serve to strengthen them in faith. Paul did not regard this as being solely for their benefit, but he anticipated the mutual encouragement or comfort that would result from their interchange on the basis of his faith and theirs. (1:11, 12)

He wanted his “brothers” or fellow believers in Rome to know that he had often planned to come to them but had until then been prevented from doing so. As

the apostle to the nations, he desired some “fruit” also among them as he had among the Gentiles in other regions. This “fruit” would be persons who responded or would yet respond in faith to the message about the Son of God. (1:13)

Paul considered himself to be a debtor to all persons, under obligation to make the glad tidings about Christ known to them. Whether “Greeks” or “barbarians,” “wise” or “senseless,” all were entitled to hear the good news. The terms “Greek” and “barbarian” apply to cultures, with “barbarian” (*bárbaros*) denoting someone from a non-Greek or non-Hellenic culture. In this context, it does not have the derogatory sense commonly associated with the word “barbarian.” The “wise” would be persons from the educated classes, whereas the “senseless” would designate those who did not have the benefit of education. (1:14)

Numerous translations are explicit in conveying the basic significance. “I have an obligation to Greek and non-Greek, to learned and simple.” (REB) “It doesn’t matter if people are civilized and educated, or if they are uncivilized and uneducated. I must tell the good news to everyone.” (CEV) “For I have a great sense of obligation to people in our culture and to people in other cultures, to the educated and uneducated alike.” (NLT)

Viewing himself as being obligated to share the good news, Paul eagerly wanted to do so in Rome. (1:15)

Considerable opposition to the glad tidings existed in the Greco-Roman world. Believers stood out as different. They ceased to engage in activities and religious practices that were deeply rooted in the existing culture but stood in conflict with Jesus’ example and teaching. Their belief regarding the benefits made possible through Jesus’ death by means of the worst form of capital punishment seemed especially foolish to the cultured and educated members of society. (1 Corinthians 1:23; Ephesians 4:17-23; 5:3, 4, 8-12, 18; 1 Peter 4:1-4)

Paul, though, was not ashamed of the good news. For believers, he knew the message about Christ to be God’s power for salvation, “to the Jew first and [also] to the Greek.” (1:16; see the Notes section.) The glad tidings concerning Christ, with a focus on the significance of his death, had a powerful effect on believers. It enabled them to see the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God’s love for them. As God’s means for having their sins forgiven and becoming reconciled to him as his children, Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death had a profound impact on their lives. In attitude, word, and action, they were moved to imitate God’s Son. The love he showed by surrendering his life for them and the love the Father revealed when sending his Son motivated them to respond in

faith and to live a life of faith. The appeal of the good news proved to be universal, moving both Jews and non-Jews to embrace it.

“God’s righteousness” is the righteousness of which he is the source. The evangel reveals that sinful humans can come into possession of this righteousness by their faith in Jesus and his sacrificial death for them. Paul wrote that “God’s righteousness is revealed out of faith into faith,” and backed this up with a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, “But the righteous one will live by [literally, out of] faith.” (1:17)

1: 18 – 2:16 The revelation of man’s sin – the Gentile

Verses 1: 18-32 God’s wrath against man’s sin revealed

In relation to God’s righteousness, the expression “out of faith and into faith” may be understood to mean that obtaining this righteousness starts with faith and leads to ever-increasing faith or ends in faith. A number of translations convey this basic significance. “I see in it God’s plan for imparting righteousness to men, a process begun and continued by their faith.” (J. B. Phillips) “The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself — that it begins and ends with faith.” (NCV) “In it the righteousness of God is seen at work, beginning in faith and ending in faith.” (REB) “For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end.” (GNT, Second Edition) “This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith.” (NLT) “For in the Good News a righteousness which comes from God is being revealed, depending on faith and tending to produce faith.” (Weymouth)

On the basis of their faith, believers enjoy an approved standing with God. They are no longer under condemnation as is the case with those who refuse to put faith in God’s provision for salvation through Jesus Christ. Unbelievers continue to be dead in trespasses and sins, but believers are alive, justified, declared guiltless, or accounted as righteous. (Ephesians 2:1-5)

In the time of Habakkuk, when the Chaldean campaign against the kingdom of Judah began, the godly members of the nation were sustained by their faith or trust in God and their unwavering conviction that the divine promises would be fulfilled. By this faith, they lived as persons enjoying divine help, blessing, and approval despite the distressing circumstances.

God’s wrath is directed against those who, in their wickedness, suppress the truth that can be known about him. This suppression implies a desire to escape all moral accountability to God. His “wrath is revealed from heaven against all

ungodliness and wickedness” in that he allows humans to follow their debased desires and to experience the hurtful consequences from their debauchery. (1:18)

Those who conduct themselves in a corrupt manner do so despite the evidence that is available to them and which evidence God has revealed. Although his eternal power and divine nature are invisible, they can be perceived from the things made or from the creative works. The evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature has existed since the “creation of the world.” Therefore, those acting as though he did not exist are without excuse. (1:19, 20; see the Notes section for examples of how even before Paul’s time conclusions about “gods” were drawn from creation.)

The visible creative works proved that lifeless, man-made images could not possibly represent an invisible, living God. So, although knowing or perceiving from the things made that a personal higher power existed, people “did not glorify him as God nor render thanks” to him. Instead of acting on what they should have known about God from the creative works, they misused their mental faculties. In their thinking, they became vain, and their “senseless mind” (literally, “heart,” which could also denote their inner self) was “darkened.” While imagining themselves to be wise, they foolishly exchanged “the glory of the imperishable God” for the lifeless images or representations of perishable humans, and of birds, quadrupeds, and reptiles. (1:20-23)

In accord with the “desires of their hearts” or the debased lusts of their inner selves, which were manifest in their deliberate choice of idolatry, God abandoned them to the pursuit of corrupt practices. He exercised no restraint on their choice of a life of uncleanness or impurity, whereby they dishonored their bodies. These debauched idolaters had exchanged “the truth of God” (which the creative works revealed) for “the lie,” the falsehood of idolatry (the veneration of things made or created instead of the Creator). (Compare Psalm 135:15-18; Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:14; 16:19, 20.) Paul, however, was moved to include an expression of praise to God, adding, “the Creator who is blessed forever [literally, into the ages]. Amen [So be it].” (1:24, 25; compare Psalm 89:52.)

Male and female prostitution came to be prominently associated with idolatrous rites, and the apostle mentioned the obscenities to which the rejection of the “truth of God” led. God totally abandoned the idolaters to their degrading passions. Women exchanged natural intercourse for that which was contrary to nature and the internal sense of decency. Men, not satisfied with natural intercourse with women, were consumed with lust for one another. Males engaged in indecent sexual acts with males. Regarding the adverse

consequences of their impure practices, Paul indicated that they received in their own person the due recompense for their error. (1:26, 27)

Since, despite the evidence available to them, the idolaters did not see fit to recognize or acknowledge God, he gave them up to their twisted mind, letting them engage in unseemly practices. (1:28) The apostle then went on to describe the kind of persons they were.

They were filled with “all unrighteousness [*adikía*], wickedness [*ponería*], covetousness [*pleonexía*], badness [*kakía*.]” (1:29; see the Notes section for additional information about this verse.)

“All” may be understood to apply to every type of the vices that are enumerated. “Unrighteousness” (*adikía*) is the opposite of *dikaiosyne*, which Greek term denotes righteousness, integrity, uprightness, purity of life, or correctness in attitude, thought, and action.

The word *ponería* signifies wickedness, iniquity, depravity, baseness, maliciousness, or sinfulness.

Covetousness (*pleonexía*) is descriptive of an inordinate desire to have more. It is an extreme passion or addiction expressed in wanting more without showing any regard for others or how they might be adversely affected.

Kakía may be defined as meaning badness, ill-will, viciousness, depravity, or malignity. It is the opposite of moral excellence or virtue.

Corrupt persons are described as “full of envy [*phthónos*], murder [*phónos*], contention [*éris*], treachery [*dólos*], malice [*kakoétheia*],” and being “whisperers [*psithyristés*.]” (1:29)

Envy (*phthónos*) is the trait that manifests itself in begrudging or resenting what others are or possess. It gives rise to outright hatred for those who become the object of envy.

In James 4:2, the verb form of *phónos* is used with apparent reference to the manifestation of a murderous disposition, and this may also be included in the mention of “murder” in this case.

Éris can denote strife, contention, wrangling, or discord. Persons given to quarreling cause division and destroy good relationships.

Dólos designates treachery, cunning, or deceit. Deceivers take advantage of others, exploiting them for selfish gain.

Kakoétheia, meaning “malice,” is characterized by the depravity of the inner self and life. It applies to a malicious disposition.

Psithyristés denotes a whisperer, tale bearer, secret slanderer, or a detractor. Whereas the whisperer engages in defamation in secret, the person designated as a *katálalos* slanders others openly.

The apostle Paul continued his list with “defamers” (*katálalos*) or evil speakers and then mentioned haters of God (*theostygés*), insolent ones (*hybristés*), arrogant ones (*hyperéphanos*), braggarts (*alazón*), contrivers of bad (*epheuretés kakón*), ones who disobey parents (*goneúsin apeitheís*), senseless ones (*asynetos*), those who were disloyal, faithless or broke agreements (*asynthetos*), lacking in normal affection (*ástorgos*), and merciless (*aneleémon*). (1:30, 31)

Theostygés is descriptive of a notoriously corrupt person who hates God. The reason for such hatred doubtless stems from wanting to do what is contrary to God’s will and feeling that God stands in the way of personal enjoyment.

The violent or insolent (*hybristés*) ones derive pleasure from wronging others. They make themselves guilty of wantonness, outrage, cruelty, or lust.

Persons described as *hyperéphanos* are arrogant or haughty, making others appear small while lifting themselves up above them. Such individuals manifest an exaggerated estimate of their means, accomplishment, or merits and despise others or treat them with contempt.

Alazón denotes a braggart or boaster. The term applies to a person who makes empty or boastful claims regarding cures and other feats, promising results that cannot be attained.

A contriver of bad (*epheuretés kakón*) would be someone who devised new ways to sin. In the course of time, humans have developed new vices to which many have become enslaved.

Children who are disobedient to parents (*goneúsin apeitheís*) have no respect for them. They ignore their needs and are unappreciative of anything parents have done and may do for them. Such individuals refuse to come to the aid of their parents when it does not suit their own aims. They are stubborn rebels who indulge their own desires and refuse to listen to sound advice. (Compare Deuteronomy 21:20.)

The individual described as senseless or foolish (*asynetos*) would be one who failed to use his mental faculties aright. The folly is of a moral kind.

Those who are disloyal, faithless or break agreements (*asynthetos*) cannot be trusted. They pretend to be trustworthy but pursue their own objectives without any regard for the agreements they may have made.

Ástorgos describes a person who lacks the kind of love that family members or close associates normally have for one another. Individuals who fit this description are unfeeling or heartless. They are solely focused on themselves and their interests.

The merciless (*aneleémon*) person has no pity or compassion for those who are experiencing suffering or distress and is devoid of any fellow feeling. Such an individual is ruthless.

Within themselves, those who were guilty of the vices Paul enumerated knew that they were wrong. Because of possessing a conscience, an internal sense of right and wrong, they could be spoken of as knowing the just decree of God. Despite this, they continued to practice vices deserving of death and looked with approval upon others who engaged in like corrupt practices. (1:32)

Notes:

In Romans 1:7, a few manuscripts omit “in Rome” and read, “To all those who are in God’s love.” The omission of the words “to those in Rome” (1:15) has even less manuscript support.

Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and a number of other manuscripts do not include the word “first” in Romans 1:16.

That the ancients had no excuse for making idols and regarding these as gods is confirmed by the conclusions they were able to reach. Based on what they saw, ancient philosophers reasoned that higher powers must exist and attributed creative works to them. In his “On the Nature of the Gods,” Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) had one of the debaters in his work remark, “In the sky innumerable fiery stars exist, of which the sun is the chief.” Commenting on what would happen if the fiery stars were closer to the earth, the debater is quoted as saying, “We should inevitably be burnt.” Regarding a person who concluded that this came about by chance, he continued, “He who believes this, may as well believe, that if a great quantity of the twenty-one letters, composed either of gold, or any other material, were [repeatedly] thrown upon the ground,

they would fall into such order as legibly to form the Annals of Ennius. I doubt whether chance could make a single verse of them.”

He then quoted from a work (now lost) of the Greek philosopher Aristotle of the fourth century BCE. This philosopher concluded that, if there were people who lived underground in large and spacious homes, adorned with statues and pictures, and comfortably furnished, and then one day would actually come to see the earth and the sky, they would be moved to acknowledge that they were seeing the works of the gods. The following is part of the quotation, If “they should immediately behold the earth, the seas, the heavens; should consider the vast extent of the clouds and force of the winds; should see the sun, and observe its grandeur and beauty; ... and when night has darkened the land, should contemplate the heavens bespangled and adorned with stars; the surprising variety of the moon, in its increase and wane; ...when ...they should see these things, they would undoubtedly conclude that there are gods, and that these are their mighty works.”

The link of moral corruption to idolatry must have been familiar to Jewish believers. In the apocryphal book known as the “Wisdom of Solomon” (thought to date from the first century BCE and preserved in fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, and fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Ephraemi), the following is stated: “The idol made with hands is accursed, and so is the one who made it — he for having made it, and the perishable thing because it was named a god. (14:8, NRSV) “For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world.” (14:12-14, NRSV)

In Romans 1:29, later manuscripts include the term *porneía* (fornication or sexual immorality), and fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus omits *dólos* (treachery).

Either before or after the expression meaning “without normal affection” (*ástorgos*), a number of manuscripts (in Romans 1:31) add *aspóndos* (irreconcilable or implacable). Perhaps the addition occurred when the copyist recalled the word from the list in 2 Timothy 3:2-5, where *aspóndos* follows *astórgos*.

Romans 2: 1-29

Verses 2: 1-16 The sin of the Gentile

The first word in the opening verse is *diό*, meaning “therefore.” This conjunction appears to link what follows with the previous statement. Those guilty of the vices Paul enumerated and who looked with approval upon others who engaged in them knew the decree of God indicating that these things merited condemnation. In view of this full awareness respecting wanton behaviour, any man or individual (regardless of who he might be) who judged or condemned someone else for deviant acts would be without excuse and would condemn himself when engaging in corrupt actions. Such an individual would demonstrate that he could determine what is and is not right or proper, eliminating any basis for claiming ignorance. Paul’s reference to doing the same things does not necessarily mean engaging in the identical wrongs but denotes carrying out the same kind of lawless deeds. (2:1)

The apostle and those to whom he wrote knew that God’s judgment is expressed in harmony with “truth” or in keeping with the actual state of affairs, and is directed against those who are guilty of debased practices. For this reason, God’s judgment will always be impartial and just. (2:2)

Individuals who condemn others for their lawless behaviour may wrongly conclude that they will escape God’s judgment despite engaging in sinful practices. To counter this, Paul raised the rhetorical question, “Do you think you, O man who judges those who practice these [lawless] things and do them yourself, will escape the judgment of God?” (2:3)

By means of his next question, the apostle stressed that engaging in corrupt behaviour meant despising the “riches,” abundance, greatness, or priceless nature of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience. Lawless conduct reveals a deliberate failure to recognize that the purpose of divine kindness is to lead sinners to repentance. (2:4)

Persons who refuse to repent, maintaining a hard and unrepentant heart (an inner disposition that refuses to regret wrong conduct and to change), are “storing up wrath” for themselves. They are building up a record of wrongdoing that is reserved for divine wrath, which will be expressed when God reveals his just judgment at his coming day of wrath. (2:5) All will then be recompensed according to their deeds. (2:6; compare Psalm 62:12[13].)

Those who persevere in work that is good and thereby seek the “glory” (splendour or renown), honour (dignity), and the imperishable state that God grants to those whom he approves will receive eternal life from him. (2:7) This is the real life, a life of an enduring relationship with him and all the blessings associated therewith.

God’s adverse judgment will be rendered against those who act “out of contentiousness [*eritheía*],” fighting against what is proper, and “disobey the truth” or refuse to conduct themselves according to what is right but obey unrighteousness, revealing themselves to be enslaved to evil. They will come to be recipients of God’s wrath and anger. (2:8; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

This will mean “affliction and distress” for those whose deeds have been hurtful to others. Not a “soul” or no single person, whether Jew or Greek (non-Jew), will escape wrath, anger, affliction, and distress for flagrant moral wrongs. Probably because of the greater enlightenment available to the Jews because of having been given God’s law, Paul added “first” after Jew (“the Jew first and [also] the Greek”). Those whose deeds are good would come to be in possession of “glory” (splendour or renown), “honour” (dignity), and “peace” (tranquillity and well-being as divinely approved persons). This, too, would be for the “Jew first and [also] the Greek” or non-Jew. No one would be specially favoured on the basis of descent, for God does not act with partiality (literally, does not accept faces). He does not treat individuals based on who they are but judges them based on what they have done. (2:9-11)

All who sinned without having the law would perish for their wrongs “without law” or without having their transgressions judged on the basis of the law. In the case of all who did have the law, they would be judged by it. (2:12)

Possession of the law did not make anyone righteous or upright. Therefore, it was not enough for individuals to be mere “hearers of the law.” For them to be justified before God or for him to consider them to be upright persons, they would need to be “doers of law,” living up to it. (2:13)

When non-Jewish peoples who did not have the law met certain requirements it contained, doing so “by nature” or instinctively, they proved to be a law to themselves. Although they did not have the law in written form, they did have an internal sense of right and wrong. For this reason, Paul referred to them as having the “work of the law,” or what the law required, “written on their hearts.” Certain moral demands of the law proved to be part of their inner selves. Therefore, this inner sense of right and wrong, or their conscience, could act as a

witness for or against them, either accusing them of wrongdoing or excusing or approving their attitude, words, or deeds. (2:14, 15)

In the day when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge the deeds that had remained hidden from human view, he will do so according to what individuals could and should have known based on what was available to them. The Jews had the law, whereas the non-Jewish people had law in the form of conscience, an internal sense of right and wrong. According to the evangel the apostle Paul proclaimed, there will be a day of judgment or reckoning. Both Jews and non-Jews will be judged, and for all persons a basis for doing so exists. (2:16)

2:17 – 3:20 The revelation of man’s sin – the Jew

Verses 2:17 – 3:8 The sin of the Jew revealed

In view of the idolatry and debauched practices existing in the Greco-Roman world, Jews would have regarded their way of life as superior to that of non-Jews. With apparent awareness of this, the apostle Paul, however, did not direct his words to the Jewish people as a whole nor to Jewish believers specifically. When drawing attention to the wrong kind of pride and the failure to live up what it meant to be one of God’s people, he started his discussion with a man who called himself (or identified himself as) a Jew. Such a Jew, whom the apostle addressed with the singular “you,” is described as “resting on the law,” boasting in God, knowing God’s will, and, because of having been instructed in the law, able to determine what would be best in matters of conduct. (2:17, 18)

The mention of “resting on the law” suggests that the individual trusted in his standing before God because of possessing the law. The person’s boasting in God seems to point to an assumed approved relationship with him. In view of the context, the knowing of God’s will is likewise an assumed knowing, as it is not identified as a knowing that is evident from uprightness in attitude, word, and deed. Based on having been instructed in the law, the man considers himself equipped to make proper evaluations, determining the preferable course of action.

He feels sure that he can serve as a guide to the blind, those lacking the enlightenment the law has given him. In the moral darkness of the world, the man regards himself as a light, making clear to others the direction they should be following. (2:19) He views himself as a corrector of those who lack good judgment and a teacher of “babes” (persons lacking in the knowledge and experience needed to conduct their affairs aright). The basis for this superior view of himself is a presumed possession of “the embodiment of the knowledge

and of the truth in the law.” (2:20) This “embodiment of knowledge” appears to designate what the individual conceived to be the absolute knowledge incorporated in the law, knowledge relating to direction for one’s daily life. In being associated with “truth,” the law, to the one who relied on possessing it, contained truth or trustworthy guidance in the absolute sense.

Paul then raised the challenging questions, “You, then, who teach someone else, do you not teach yourself? You, the one proclaiming not to steal, do you steal? You, the one telling [others] not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? [Exodus 20:14, 15; Deuteronomy 7:25, 26; compare Psalm 50:16-18.] You, the one abhorring idols, are you robbing temples? You, the one boasting in the law, do you dishonour God by transgressing the law?” Failure to live up to the law while wanting to impose it on others dishonoured God, the giver of the law. It resulted in bringing reproach on him, as the apostle Paul emphasized when quoting from Isaiah 52:5 (LXX), “The name of God, because of you, is blasphemed among the nations.” (2:21-24; see the Notes section for additional comments on verses 22 and 24.)

Just as mere possession of the law did not benefit those who failed to live up to it, circumcision as the sign of the covenant between God and Israel meant nothing without adherence to the covenant obligations. In the case of a Jewish man who transgressed the law, his circumcision proved to be merely the evidence of an operation performed in his infancy. From God’s standpoint, his circumcision would be uncircumcision. (2:25) Centuries earlier, the prophet Jeremiah (9:25, 26, NRSV) expressed a similar thought when conveying the word of YHWH, “I will attend to all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin: Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all those with shaven temples who live in the desert. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”

Regarding an uncircumcised man who, guided by his conscience, observed the moral requirements of the law, Paul raised the rhetorical question, “Will not his uncircumcision be reckoned as circumcision?” (2:26) By his conduct, such a man, though uncircumcised, would reveal the true significance of circumcision, its being a bodily mark of one whose actions were divinely approved. God’s dealings with individuals confirms this. Whereas he responded favourably to the sincere petitions of non-Israelites, he refused to answer the prayers of unfaithful Israelites. (1 Kings 8:41-43; Isaiah 1:15; Jeremiah 11:14; Jonah 3:6-10; Acts 10:1-4, 34, 35)

When living up to the moral requirements of the law, the uncircumcised man would condemn the one who was circumcised but transgressed the law which he

was obligated to observe. The lawless Jew's failure would be exposed in the light of the laudable conduct of the man who did not have the benefit of the law as a guide. (2:27)

Drawing on the etymology of the designation "Jew" or "Judah" expressed in Genesis 29:35 (which links the name to "laud" or "praise"), the apostle Paul identified the real Jew as one whose circumcision is of the heart and whose praise comes from God, not men. (2:28, 29) What counted was not the mark of the physical operation but whether the individual's "heart," or his inner self, was responsive to God's requirements. The value that men might attach to circumcision would not be a valid basis for praise or for being recognized as one of God's people. To be a Jew or one of God's people in the true sense would mean having his approval or being lauded or praised by him for living a life that harmonizes with his will.

Notes:

In Romans 2:8, the Greek word *eritheía* can mean contentiousness or strife. Numerous translators, however, have opted for the meaning "selfish ambition" and refer to the individuals as "those who are self-seeking" (NIV, NRSV), "those who selfishly disobey the truth" (NAB), and "those who are governed by selfish ambition" (REB).

The apostle Paul referred to the glad tidings about Jesus Christ as "my evangel." (Romans 2:16) This did not mean that the message originated with the apostle, but it was the good news that he made known to others.

No specific passage in the extant Hebrew Scriptures refers to the robbing of temples. (Romans 2:22) But Josephus, in his *Antiquities* (IV, viii, 10), attributes the following command to Moses, "Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem as such; nor may anyone steal what belongs to strange temples; nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god."

In the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, the part of Isaiah 52:5 that is quoted in Romans 2:24 reads, "And continually, all the day, my name is despised." The reading of Isaiah 52:5 in the Septuagint, though differing from Romans 2:24 in word order, conveys the same basic meaning, "Because of you, continually my name is blasphemed among the nations."

Romans 3: 1-31

In view of what Paul had said, some may have concluded that there was no benefit in having a Jewish identity. For this apparent reason, the apostle raised

the question, “What, then, is the advantage of the Jew, or what is the value of circumcision?” (3:1)

In his response, the apostle did not diminish the advantage or value of having a Jewish heritage, but indicated that it was of great benefit (“much in every way”). The foremost reason for this was because the Jews had been entrusted with the “words of God.” (3:2) Of all people, they alone had a written record concerning what he had revealed to them through his prophets, making available to them a clear expression of his will and also what they needed to know to identify the coming Messiah or Christ.

One might reasonably conclude that having the benefit of God’s words should have been evident from their readiness to accept Jesus, but this was not the case. Addressing the unbelief of the Jews, Paul asked, “What then? If some did not believe, will their unbelief nullify God’s trustworthiness?” (3:3) Seemingly, the unbelief of those to whom God’s words had been committed suggested that these words and God himself were not deserving of trust. To counter this wrong conclusion, Paul continued, “Never may that be! Let God be proved true, but every man a liar, as it is written, ‘That you might be justified in your words and vindicated when you are being judged.’” (3:4) Never is God’s trustworthiness in doubt. The fault lies with humans. Their being “liars,” unreliable or untrustworthy, has no bearing on the dependability of God or his word. So their refusal to act on God’s word in faith only exposes their unreliability.

The quotation from Psalm 51:4 (50:6, LXX) confirmed this. According to the Masoretic Text, God is just when pronouncing his sentence and pure or blameless when rendering judgment. This differs from the reading of the Septuagint, which the quotation in Romans 3:4 follows. In the Septuagint and in Romans 3:4, the infinitive form of the word meaning “are being judged” is passive. In relation to “vindicated,” this could suggest that, when his words or actions are judged, God would be proved true. If this is the significance Paul wanted to convey, his point would be that a judgment of God, based on the unbelief of the Jews, would vindicate him as trustworthy. Both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint, despite the difference in the wording, contain an acknowledgment that what God expressed when judging the psalmist was right and, therefore, he and his word are deserving of complete trust.

Human unrighteousness, injustice, or lack of uprightness causes God’s righteousness or justice to be revealed in sharp contrast. This prompted Paul to ask, “What shall we say? Is God unjust when he inflicts wrath [wrathful punishment]?” When raising this point, the apostle did so according to human reasoning, or, as he worded it, “I am speaking according to man” (or as flawed

humans might wrongly express themselves). Paul rejected the idea inherit in the question, saying, “Never may that be! How, then, is God to judge the world?” (3:5, 6)

The flawed reasoning about benefiting God through human moral failings would dispense with judgment. It would make it appear that condemnatory judgment should not be expressed against those whose wayward ways proved to be of no disadvantage to God. Such twisted reasoning would pervert justice.

Continuing with the faulty reasoning, Paul said, “But if, through my lie [failure, faithlessness, or unreliability], the truth [trustworthiness or dependability] of God abounds to his glory, why am I still being judged as a sinner? And [why] not [say], as we are blasphemed [falsely accused of teaching] and as some claim we [the editorial plural applying to Paul] are saying, ‘Let us do the evil things that the good things may come?’” (3:7, 8)

Verses 3: 9-20 The universality of sin

Certain ones appear to have misrepresented Paul’s teaching that the attainment of a proper standing with God did not result from striving to live up to the law but came about through faith in Christ. Flawless law observance was impossible, and so the apostle stressed that coming into an approved relationship with God was an expression of his favour or unearned kindness. Whereas Paul repeatedly emphasized that the cleansing effected through Christ and the individual’s faith in him and his sacrificial death required living an upright life, some twisted what he said, probably claiming that he promoted lawlessness by his focus on God’s grace or his unmerited favour. (Romans 6:15; 1 Corinthians 6:12; Galatians 5:1-4)

After referring to being slandered about doing evil so that good may come, Paul added, “Of whom the judgment is just.” (3:8) The antecedent for the Greek masculine plural pronoun in the genitive case (“of whom”) is not clearly apparent. It could refer either to those who slandered Paul’s teaching or to those who justified living sinful lives.

Translations reflect both meanings. “You might as well say, ‘Let’s do something evil, so that something good will come of it!’ Some people even claim that we are saying this. But God is fair and will judge them as well.” (CEV) “In this case, the slanderous report some people are spreading would be true, that we teach that one should do evil that good may come of it. In fact such people are justly condemned.” (NJB) “It would be the same to say, ‘We should do evil so that good will come.’ Some people find fault with us and say we teach this, but

they are wrong and deserve the punishment they will receive.” (NCV) “Why not indeed ‘do evil that good may come’, as some slanderously report me as saying? To condemn such men as these is surely just.” (REB) “If you follow that kind of thinking, however, you might as well say that the more we sin the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned, yet some slander me by saying this is what I preach!” (NLT) “And why should we not say — for so they wickedly misrepresent us, and so some charge us with arguing — ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? The condemnation of those who would so argue is just.” (Weymouth)

The question, “What then?” relates to the thoughts Paul expressed concerning the sinful state among non-Jews and Jews. (3:9) This question is followed by a first person plural form of the Greek word *proécho*, which literally means “to hold before,” that is, to hold something before one for protective purposes. It can also denote “to be before,” “to be first, or “to excel.”

In the Vulgate, a form of the Latin term *praecello* appears and can mean “to excel” or “to surpass,” suggestive of having an advantage or being better off. Numerous modern translations have adopted this meaning, “Are we Jews any better off?” (REB) “Does it mean that we Jews are better off than the Gentiles?” (CEV) “Are we Jews then a march ahead of other men?” (J. B. Phillips) “Well then, are we Jews in any better condition than the Gentiles?” (GNT, Second Edition) The objection that has been raised in connection with these renderings is that, if (as commonly understood) the Greek verb is in the middle voice, no parallels for this significance in the middle voice have been found in other extant Greek writings.

There is a possibility that, in verse 9, the form of the word *proécho* is passive. In that case the meaning could be, “Are we excelled?” This would provide the basis for such renderings as, “Are we Jews more highly estimated than they?” (Weymouth) “Are we at any disadvantage?” (NRSV, footnote) “Does it mean that we Jews are worse off than the Gentiles? (CEV, footnote)

If the significance of the Greek verb relates to protecting oneself, the thought could be, “Are we protected [that is, from God’s wrath]?” If, instead of applying to the Jews, the first person plural verb is an editorial plural referring to Paul, he could be understood to be saying, “Am I protecting myself?” The German *Gute Nachricht Bibel* represents Paul as asking whether he is protectively trying to avoid giving a clear explanation (*Drücke ich mich um eine klare Auskunft?*).

In view of Paul’s having indicated that there was a benefit in being a member of the Jewish people (3:1), it appears preferable to regard the question to relate to

the Jews and specifically to the statement that follows in verse 9 (“Not at all, for above we have charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.”). On this basis, the best explanation appears to be (despite the absence of grammatical support for it in other Greek writings) that, with reference to gaining an approved relationship with God, being a Jew did not constitute an advantage. Jews, like non-Jews, were under sin, unable to gain a proper standing before him through their own efforts.

The apostle then quoted a number of passages from the holy writings to prove this, introducing the quotations with the words, “as it is written.” He then continued, “No one is righteous, not even one. No one has understanding; no one is seeking God. All have deviated. Together they have become worthless. No one is doing kindness, not even one.” (3:10-12; Psalm 14:1-3 [13:1-3, LXX]; 53:1-3 [52:2-4; LXX])

In Psalm 14 (also 53), the corrupt ones are identified as enemies of God’s people (14:4; 53:4). Accordingly, Paul’s words, drawn from the expressions of the psalmist, confirm that non-Jewish peoples were not righteous but engaged in hurtful practices. The psalmist portrayed God as looking down from his heavenly position upon humans to determine whether any among them had understanding or acted wisely and were seeking him. In his quotation, Paul represents the situation according to the result of this penetrating divine examination. No one was upright; no one had understanding (the kind of understanding that recognizes the serious consequences from living a corrupt life). There was no one who wanted to seek God, desiring an approved relationship with him. All had deviated from the path of uprightness. They had become corrupt or worthless, without even as much as one practicing kindness or doing good.

“An opened grave [is] their throat.” (3:13; Psalm 5:9 [5:10, LXX]) In Psalm 5, the psalmist refers to fellow Israelites who had rebelled against God and whose words could not be trusted. Their throat, because of the words that flowed from it, was like an open burial place into which an unsuspecting person could easily fall and suffer serious injury. They used their tongues to flatter and to feign friendship while scheming to do harm.

“With their tongues, they have deceived. Poison of asps [is] under their lips.” (3:13; Psalm 140:3 [139:4, LXX]) The words of Psalm 140 (139, LXX) applied to Israelites who maliciously slandered the psalmist. Their hateful speech was deadly, as if the venom of vipers was under their lips.

“[Their] mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” (3:14; Psalm 10:7 [9:28, LXX]) “Bitterness” could refer to the malicious utterances proceeding from their mouths and which would make life bitter or distressing for those against whom they were directed. In Psalm 10, the focus is on the wicked and their hateful ways, and the context allows for the application to include peoples of non-Israelite nations. (Psalm 10:15, 16)

“Their feet [are] swift [literally, sharp] to pour out blood. Ruin and misery are in their ways, and they have not known the way of peace.” (3:15-17; Isaiah 59:7, 8) The quotation from Isaiah chapter 59 is part of the prophet’s exposure of Israel’s unfaithfulness. To attain their base objectives, lawless Israelites were quick to shed innocent blood. As they pursued their violent course, they caused others to experience ruin and suffering. Their hostile actions revealed that they knew nothing about what it meant to be at peace with God and fellow humans.

“No fear of God exists before their eyes.” (3:18; Psalm 36:1 [35:2, LXX]) Psalm 36 describes the actions of the wicked one, and so could be applied in a general sense to all who act in a corrupt manner. In the extant Septuagint text, the entire verse (from which Paul paraphrased only the concluding part) reads, “To sin, the transgressor declares in himself, there is no fear of God before his eyes.” This rendering suggests that, because of banishing any reverential regard for God, the lawless one is able to persist in sin.

Paul referred to the collection of holy writings from which he quoted as the “law,” for these sacred writings had the force of law and provided dependable guidance. Probably including himself among the Jews to whom the “law” or the holy writings had been committed, he made the point that what the law says is addressed to those who are under it, silencing every mouth and proving that the whole world is answerable to God. Every mouth is silenced because those who are under the law cannot claim that they are without sin. The holy writings do not provide them with an excuse. Both Jews and non-Jews are exposed as sinners deserving of punishment for their wrongs. (3:19)

No one is able to observe the commands of the law flawlessly, and so no “flesh” can be justified before God. Humans simply cannot gain an approved standing before him by doing what the law says, for they cannot avoid falling short or missing the mark of faultless obedience. Accordingly, they are shown up as sinners, for the law clearly identifies what sin is and thus makes it possible for them to know or recognize sin. (3:20)

3: 21-31 Justification defined

Verses 21-23 Justification involves the revelation of God's righteousness

The “righteousness of God” is the righteousness of which he is the source. Through his unmerited favour, humans are granted this righteousness apart from law or without the flawless obedience to the law that would be impossible for them. The apostle Paul referred to this righteousness as “now” having been manifested, for it was not until Jesus came to the earth that how humans could obtain an approved standing with his Father was fully disclosed. Previously, however, the law and the prophets had provided testimony concerning this. (3:21) They pointed to the coming of the Messiah and that, through him, forgiveness of sins would be made possible. (Genesis 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Isaiah 11:1-5; 53:2-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Zechariah 12:10-13:1; compare Acts 10:43; 28:23.)

It is through their faith in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished when laying down his life that humans are put right with his Father, coming into possession of his righteousness. This is true of all humans. In this regard there is no distinction between Jews and non-Jews, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (3:22, 23) They do not reflect the purity of the magnificent holiness of God, in whose image the first man was created.

Verses 24-28 Justification involves the imputation of God's righteousness

As sinners, humans do not merit an approved standing before God. It is a generous divine gift that they can be justified or accounted as upright by God's unmerited favour expressed through the “redemption in Christ Jesus.” (3:24) When laying down his life, Jesus provided the basis for redeeming sinners and having his righteousness accounted to them on the basis of their faith in him.

God set forth, offered, or made his Son available to humans as an atonement or expiation for their sins. They could avail themselves of this means of having their sins forgiven by faith in his blood, which he shed sacrificially for them. By making a provision for sins to be forgiven, God demonstrated his own righteousness although, in his forbearance, he had previously passed over or left unpunished the wrongs humans had committed. (3:25) The implication is that justice requires that penalties be imposed for wrongdoing. Sins are debts, and debts must be repaid. In keeping with his justice, God arranged for the full payment of the human debt load and in a manner that demonstrated his love.

Accordingly, his exercise of forbearance respecting sins in the past did not call into question his righteousness or justice.

Commenting on the manner in which God deals with sinners since his Son's death and resurrection, Paul referred to it as an arrangement "in the present time." From then onward, God has continued to demonstrate his righteousness when justifying humans on the basis of their faith in Jesus. (3:26) In expression of God's love, the debt of sin has been paid in full, and sinners or debtors can avail themselves of this benefit by trustingly accepting that their debt has been cancelled.

The good standing before God that humans can enjoy is not one based on personal achievement, completely ruling out any boasting. Especially Jews may have felt that their fleshly distinction gave them a basis for boasting or pride, but Paul had shown that all humans were sinners, with no one having any meritorious standing before God. Through what law or on the basis what principle is boasting excluded? Paul answered, "Of works? No, but through the law of faith." (3:27) Works depend on human effort, and can give rise to pride on the basis of outstanding achievement. Faith, on the other hand, is an acknowledgment of human helplessness and need. The contrast is between doing what the law required and putting faith or absolute trust in Jesus Christ's sacrificial death as God's means for having sins forgiven. J. B. Phillips, in his translation, paraphrased the thought, "The whole matter is now on a different plane — believing instead of achieving."

With apparent reference to believers, Paul continued, "We deem that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law." (3:28) Being put right with God is not a matter of trying to attain the impossible, flawlessly living up to everything the law required.

Verses 29-31 Objections to justification answered

If justification were just partially dependent on law observance, the Most High would be the God of the Jews only, for they alone were given the law. This appears to be the underlying reason for Paul's words, "The God of the Jews only?" The apostle then continues, "Not also of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles." (3:29)

He is indeed only one God, with no sinful human or people having any special claim on him. The basis on which he justifies Jews (the circumcised) is faith, and he justifies the Gentiles (the uncircumcised) through their faith. The

exclusive means for gaining an approved standing before God is faith in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished by laying down his life. (3:30)

This, though, does not mean that faith undermines law, making believers lawless persons. As Paul expressed it in answer to the question whether we believers make law ineffective through faith, “Never may that be. Instead, we establish law.” (3:31) Having been forgiven of sins on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, believers are motivated to live upright lives, appreciating the great love that has been shown to them. Moreover, law is just, and the arrangement for having sins forgiven is fair for everyone. No one has an advantage on the basis of race, nation, tribe, social standing, education, or anything else. When believers point to Jesus Christ as the sole means for gaining an approved standing with his Father, they are establishing law and revealing a just and loving provision. They are fulfilling the purpose for which the law was given and that purpose was to produce a holy people, a people whose lives reflect purity in attitude, word, and deed. (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:14-16)

Notes:

In Romans 3:10-18, the quotations do not correspond exactly to the extant Hebrew text nor to that of the Septuagint. Paul dictated his letter to the Romans, and so it is likely that he paraphrased the words as he recalled them. His use of the passages, though, harmonized with the original setting.

Fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus includes the words of Romans 3:13-18 in verse 3 of Psalm 13(14). This appears to have been a copyist’s addition taken directly from Paul’s letter to the Romans, for the wording is the same.

Romans 4: 1-25

Chapter 4 Justification illustrated

Verses 1-5 By God’s dealings with Abraham

Paul had stressed that humans had no ground for boasting. The Jews, though, would have thought of Abraham as an exception.

In the latter part of the second century BCE, the grandson of the compiler of Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach) translated his grandfather’s work from the original Hebrew into Greek. Some indication of the high value Jews in earlier times placed on this work is the fact that fragmentary Hebrew manuscripts of the book have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 44:19, 20 (NRSV) contains a clear reference to

Abraham's being favored on account of law observance. "Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory. He *kept the law of the Most High*, and entered into a covenant with him; he certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he proved faithful."

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus referred to Abraham as meriting rewards. After relating the account about Abraham's (Abram's) rescue of Lot, Josephus continued, "God commended his virtue, and said, You will not, however, lose the rewards you have deserved to receive by your glorious actions. [Abraham] answered, And what advantage will it be to me to have such rewards, when I have none to enjoy them after me?" (*Antiquities*, I, x, 3) It is noteworthy that, although Genesis 15:1 includes the divine promise that Abraham's reward would be great, no mention is made of this being on the basis of glorious deeds.

With apparent reference to the Jewish view of Abraham, Paul raised the question, "What, then, shall we say [regarding] Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?" (4:1; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

If, on the basis of works or personal efforts, Abraham had been justified or been divinely approved, he would have been able to boast. With God, however, he did not have a basis for boasting, and Paul backed this up with a quotation from Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (4:2, 3)

In the case of a worker, wages received for labour are not regarded as a favour but as a debt. (4:4) For the person who has not worked but believes in God who justifies the ungodly or considers them as approved, "his faith is reckoned as righteousness." God looks upon the individual who manifests faith or trust in him as acceptable. (4:5)

Verses 6-8 By the case of David (parenthetical)

Referring to Psalm 31:1, 2 (LXX; 32:1, 2, Masoretic Text), Paul called attention to the "happiness" or the enviable sense of well-being about which David spoke. Persons whom God credits as righteous without their having performed any works (fulfilling the requirements of the law) enjoy this happiness or this fortunate state of having been forgiven of their sins. "Fortunate [are] those whose lawlessness has been forgiven and whose sins have been covered over. Fortunate [is] the man whose sin the Lord [YHWH, Hebrew text] will not reckon." (4:6-8)

These words reflected David's own experience. He had not earned justification, acquittal, or forgiveness of sins, for he had seriously failed in living up to the requirements of the law. Exclusively owing to God's unmerited kindness, David experienced the "happiness" or the welcome feeling of relief resulting from his having been forgiven. By no means did his deeds merit the desirable sense of happiness or well-being that he gained upon coming to know that God had not severed his relationship with him.

Verses 9-25 Resumption of the case of Abraham

Was this happy or fortunate state of acquittal only possible for those who, like David, were Jews and identified by circumcision (the sign of their covenant relationship with God)? Or, could uncircumcised Gentiles also be justified or acquitted, becoming sharers in this happiness or fortunate condition? The apostle Paul provided the answer, again pointing to Abraham who was justified or credited as righteous on the basis of his faith. (4:9)

At that time, was Abraham circumcised or uncircumcised? He was uncircumcised and thereafter received the sign of circumcision as an authenticating seal of the faith-based righteousness he had in his former uncircumcised state. In this manner, Abraham could become the father of all uncircumcised believers, with their link to him being faith in God and the one promised to come in Abraham's line of descent (the Messiah or Christ). As their father was counted as righteous based on his faith and while yet uncircumcised, they would be reckoned as righteous on the same basis. (4:10, 11; see the Notes section regarding verse 11.)

Moreover, as the one who had received the sign of circumcision, Abraham would also be the father of the circumcised. This, though, does not mean that Abraham is the father of all circumcised men in his line of descent, but he is the father of all who conduct themselves according to the faith he had while yet uncircumcised. (4:12; compare John 8:39-44; Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 3:29.) As Paul's words have been paraphrased, "He is the father of the circumcised, provided they are not merely circumcised, but also follow that path of faith which our father Abraham trod while he was still uncircumcised." (REB)

The promise to Abraham and his "seed" or offspring did not have its source in law, not being dependent on living up to certain legal requirements. Instead, God promised Abraham that he would be heir of the world "through [the]

righteousness of faith.” (4:13) On account of his faith, he came to have a right standing with God and, therefore, was given the promise.

The fulfilment of this promise would mean that the Messiah or Christ, a descendant of Abraham, would exercise rulership as the one who inherited the world. Through this promised one, peoples of all nations would be blessed. (Genesis 15:5, 6; 22:17, 18; Psalm 2:8; Hebrews 1:2) Those who become children of Abraham by reason of their faith also become Christ’s fellow heirs.

If “out of law,” or on the basis of law observance, individuals were constituted heirs, faith would have no value and the promise would be nullified. (4:14) Law observance would not require faith, and a promise linked to living up to the law would be conditional. One could not rely upon the fulfilment of such a conditional promise.

Instead of providing hope, the law functioned in a manner that led to wrath. Because of failing to adhere to it flawlessly, all persons under the law were condemned by it and deserving of wrathful punishment. Where no specific law exists, there is no transgression. (4:15) No one can be charged with violating a non-existing law.

“Therefore,” as Paul continued, the promise is “out of faith.” It was given to Abraham on the basis of his faith, and all who would share in its fulfilment do so on account of their faith. With faith alone being linked to the promise, the apostle could speak of it as being “according to grace,” unearned favour, or unmerited kindness. This guaranteed the promise (that is, its fulfilment) to all of Abraham’s seed, not only to the person under the law (literally, “the one out of the law”) but also to the individual who had faith like that of Abraham (literally, “the one out of Abraham’s faith”). (4:16)

Paul established the point that both Jews (who were under the law) and non-Jews (to whom the law had not been given) become sharers in the fulfilment of the promise. He did this by identifying Abraham as the “father of all of us,” supporting this with a quotation from Genesis 17:5, where God is represented as telling Abraham, “A father of many nations I have made you.” (4:16, 17)

The apostle’s next words (“before whom he [Abraham] believed”) could mean that Abraham, who believed, is our father in God’s eyes or that, in the presence of God, Abraham, the father of many nations, believed. God is the one who makes the dead alive and calls or summons into being the things that are not. (4:17) This proved to be true of Abraham and Sarah. Before the birth of Isaac, both of them were dead insofar as having a son was concerned. For the promise

to be fulfilled required their being made alive and a calling into being of what did not exist.

From a human standpoint, Abraham had no hope of having a son by Sarah. God's promise, however, gave him hope, and he believed that he would become the father of many nations, just as he had been told (Genesis 15:5), "So [as innumerable as the stars] your seed will be." (4:18)

Despite what seemed humanly impossible at the time, Abraham did not weaken in his faith, but continued to believe God's promise to him. As to what Abraham considered or did not consider, manuscript readings vary. The oldest extant manuscripts and a number of others represent Abraham as not weakening in faith even though he considered his own inability to father a child and Sarah's being past the age of childbearing. Many other manuscripts may be understood to mean that Abraham's faith was so strong that he did not consider his own situation and that of Sarah. He was nearly 100 years of age. Insofar as fathering offspring was concerned, his body was ["already," according to numerous manuscripts] dead, and so was "the womb of Sarah." (4:19)

Nevertheless, he did not succumb to unbelief or distrust in God's promise, but came to be empowered by faith, "giving glory to God and being fully convinced that what he has promised he is also able to do." (4:20, 21) Abraham's faith or trust in God gave him the strength not to abandon hope. His giving "glory to God" may refer to his crediting God for remaining confident in the sure fulfilment of the promise.

Abraham's faith in God's word or promise was credited to him as righteousness. The Most High considered him as being in a right or approved relationship with him. (4:22)

It was not "only" for Abraham or with exclusive application to him that the words, "it [Abraham's faith or his believing] was reckoned to him" (Genesis 15:6), were recorded in the holy writings. "But also for us," Paul continued, "to whom it [faith] is to be reckoned [as righteousness], to [us] who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." (4:23, 24) The case of Abraham revealed that a righteous standing before God was possible on the basis of faith. For Abraham, it was faith in God and the fulfilment of his promise about the "seed," and now it is faith in the promised one, the Christ, and in God who resurrected him.

Jesus Christ was handed over to die sacrificially for "our trespasses." The sinless one died for sinners. He was resurrected for "our justification." (4:25) He

maintained his uprightness in faultless purity, making it possible for all who put their faith in him and who come to be at one with him to have his righteousness attributed to them. Forgiven of their sins, they become sharers in his righteousness.

Notes

In Romans 4:1, numerous manuscripts include a form of the Greek word *heurísko* (find or obtain) before “Abraham” or after “our.” In fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, this word is missing. Depending on which manuscript evidence they have chosen to follow, translators vary in their renderings. “Well then, what can we say about our ancestor Abraham?” (CEV) “What, then, are we to say about Abraham, our ancestor by natural descent?” (REB) “What then can we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?” (HCSB) “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?” (NIV) “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?” (ESV) “What then shall we say about Abraham our ancestor? What did he obtain according to the flesh?” (*Que dirons-nous donc d'Abraham notre ancêtre? Qu'a-t-il obtenu selon la chair?* [TOB, French])

After “counted” or “reckoned” (*logízomai*) in Romans 4:11, numerous manuscripts include *kai*, meaning “also” in this context. Modern translations commonly do not include “also.” One exception is the *New American Bible*, where the “also” is printed in brackets. “Thus he was to be the father of all the uncircumcised who believe, so that to them [also] righteousness might be credited.”

Romans 5: 1-21

5:1-11 The result of justification

Verses 1-5 Our present possessions

As a consequence of having been justified, acquitted, or forgiven of sins, believers can enjoy “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Their justification has its source in faith (it is, literally, “out of faith”). This is the faith that the Son of God died sacrificially and thus made it possible for humans to be declared guiltless. (5:1)

The form of the Greek word for “have” is not the same in all the extant manuscripts. Paul is represented as saying either “we have peace” or “may we have peace” (“let us have peace”). This peace is a state of reconciliation with

God. Having been forgiven of their sins, believers are no longer at enmity with him. Through Jesus Christ, peace has come to be their possession. Only by believing in him and the value of his sacrifice is alienation with his Father terminated. (5:1; compare Ephesians 2:11-18.)

Through Christ, believers have access to God's grace, unearned favour, or unmerited kindness. Admittance into his favour involves having an approved relationship with him as his children and coming to enjoy all the blessings associated with being members of his beloved family. According to many manuscripts, this access to God's favour is "by faith," signifying trust in him and his means for being reconciled to him. The words, "this favour in which we stand," indicate that believers are now living in the realm of God's favour and benefit from his help, guidance, and blessing. (5:2)

In prospect for believers is the "glory of God," becoming sharers in God's glory or splendour upon being able to reflect his image faultlessly in the future sinless state. The hope of sharing in the divine glory occasions a proper pride or boasting. In view of the unparalleled greatness of God's glory, the hope of attaining it likewise gives rise to a joyous pride or exultant confidence that transcends any feeling of pride a recipient of mundane honours for notable achievements might experience. (5:2; see the Notes section.)

The taking of pride to which Paul referred is not a boasting about self. Therefore, he could say, "let us boast in sufferings." Affliction is not associated with honour, and, from a human standpoint, would not prompt boasting. The basis for an individual's taking pride in sufferings would be from recognizing the strength God provides for remaining faithful and the spiritual benefits that can result. So, for believers, "not only" is joyous pride associated with their hope, but even now they can take pride in their sufferings. J. B. Phillips, in his translation, paraphrased the apostle's words, "This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of future joys — we can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles." (5:3)

Believers know that suffering while remaining faithful to God and his Son produces endurance, steadfastness, or patience. (5:3) Empowered by the strength God supplies through his spirit, they are able patiently and steadfastly to pass through the period of affliction and are in a better position to endure other trials they may have to face.

Endurance produces that which is tested, approved, or genuine. Those who remain steadfast in their faith in God and Christ during the time of their affliction come to possess a tested faith that has been revealed as genuine. The

tested or approved condition produces hope, for the experience of being sustained in affliction proves to the one who has endured faithfully that God can be relied upon and that hope based on his word or promise is certain to be fulfilled. (5:4) Those who possess a faith that has been tested by affliction come to be persons filled with hope, confident that God will continue to care for them, bless them richly, and prove to be their rewarder.

Never will this hope become a cause for shame or disappointment because of failing to be fulfilled. The hope itself has been engendered by God's love. In his very being, our heavenly Father is love and so will always deal with his children in a loving manner. The apostle Paul linked hope to this love, adding, "for the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit that has been given to us." (5:5)

Verses 6-11 Our future security

The Greek verb *ekchéo*, meaning "pour out," may point to an abundant bestowal of love, filling the heart or the inner self. "Love of God" can signify God's love for believers, love like his (godly love), or the love believers have for God. Based on verse 8, which specifically focuses on God's love for believers, the preferable meaning in verse 5 would also be the love God has for those who respond in faith. Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ and becoming recipients of God's spirit, the inmost selves of believers are filled with a profound awareness of their heavenly Father's love for them. Therefore, they are confident that hope based on the word or promise of their loving God could never lead to disappointment.

Ancient manuscripts vary in the way Paul introduces the next thought, either reading "for yet" or "if indeed" (since indeed) in relation to when Christ died. He died for the impious or ungodly at the right or divinely appointed time. (Compare Galatians 4:4, 5.) Humans were then ("still," according to numerous manuscripts) in a "weak" or helpless condition, unable to liberate themselves from enslavement to sin. Their condition was that of wrongdoers deserving to be punished. (5:6)

In their sinful state, humans are neither faultlessly upright nor good. In a relative sense, though, others may regard a person as an upright or good man or woman. Righteous or upright persons would be those who conduct themselves in a law-abiding manner, not being guilty of living a life that repeatedly harmed others. Good men and women would be those who do more than what is expected of them, compassionately responding to the needs of others and being self-sacrificing. The good person is far more likely to win the affection of others than

would individuals who merely do what is required of them. Therefore, as Paul indicated, it would be difficult to die for a righteous person, though possibly one might even dare to die for a good person. (5:7)

Yet, what humans would find extremely difficult or, in fact, impossible to do God has done. He proved his love for us by having Christ die for us while we were still sinners, neither upright nor good in his sight. (5:8)

The precious blood that Jesus shed when dying sacrificially made it possible for those who accept this provision for having their sins forgiven to be justified or counted by his Father as righteous. In view of the fact that believers are justified by Christ's blood, which made it necessary for him to die for them, now that he is alive he will continue to be their advocate. He will save them from the wrath that is to come against those who defiantly persist in unbelief and rebellion against his Father. (5:9; compare 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.)

For those who were God's enemies, the death of Jesus Christ resulted in their reconciliation to his Father. Now that believers have been "reconciled to God through the death of his Son," they can be even more confident about being saved by "his life." As the one who now lives, Jesus Christ is in position to save them from the coming wrath and to safeguard their real life, the enduring relationship with him and his Father. (5:10)

The words, "but not only," are probably to be linked to the previous reference to being "saved by [Christ's] life." Not only are believers saved by his life, they also can "take pride in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom [they] have now received reconciliation." (5:11) This taking pride or glorying in God would be on account of all that he has done for believers by means of his Son. In God or in their new relationship with him as persons reconciled through his Son, believers have every reason for exultant confidence.

5: 12-21 Justification summarised

The new headship. Being in Adam relates one to the fallen race in sin. Being in Christ is the new position in the Second Adam, the Head of the New Creation. This new creation is the ground for a holy life as unfolded in chapter 6. It is an effective answer to the objection that justifying grace leads to looseness of life.

Condemnation and Justification Contrasted

	Condemnation	Justification
Source	From one: first Adam	From one: second Adam
Extent	To all: the many	To all (by faith) the many
Cause	Disobedience, trespass	Obedience, grace
Nature	Judgment deserved	Free gift undeserved
Measure	Abounded	Abounded much more
Result	Sin, death	Righteousness, life

The expression *diá toúto*, meaning “therefore” or “for this reason,” serves to link the words that follow to the preceding comments about reconciliation with God having been made possible through Jesus Christ. The thought appears to be that the need for reconciliation proved that an alienating element, sin, entered the world of mankind. Through the one man, Adam, sin (the inability to reflect the image of God faultlessly) entered the human sphere of life. The introduction of sin or of this fatal flaw also marked the entrance of death, which then spread to all humans, for all had sinned, missing the mark of flawless conformity to the image of God on which their relationship with him and, therefore, their life depended. (5:12)

It appears that the Greek word *gár*, meaning “for,” is a marker of reason. Death spread to all mankind because all sinned, “for,” once having gained entrance into the world, sin remained, without interruption, clear down to the time the Israelites received God’s law through Moses. Whereas “sin” or the breaking of a law cannot be charged to anyone if no law exists, humans continued to die, proving that sin had entered through the one man and had remained in the world of mankind. (5:13)

So, as Paul said, “death reigned from Adam to Moses,” although the descendants of Adam had not sinned in the likeness of his transgression (a transgression that was a violation of a specific command or law and brought sin and death into the world). Regarding Adam, the apostle added that he was the image or “type of the one to come.” This coming one would be Jesus Christ. (5:14)

The context deals with the extent of the effect of what Adam and Jesus did. Therefore, Adam, in the far-reaching effect his one sin had, is a type of the all-encompassing effect Jesus brought about through his sacrificial death. Adam became the father of a sinful human race in a state of alienation from God. Through Christ, sinful humans come to be God's approved children in possession of eternal life, enjoying an enduring relationship with him and his Father.

There is a marked distinction in the effect between Adam's one trespass and the "gracious gift" (the unmerited divine favour that made forgiveness of sins possible on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial death). On account of Adam's one trespass, many died (for all had come to be sinners through him). This meant that all humans needed to be freed from the death-dealing effect of sin, requiring an act that would produce a counteracting effect on a far greater scale. Accordingly, much more would the grace or favor of God and his free gift "in the favor of the one man, Jesus Christ," abound to many. (5:15)

The "favor of the one man, Jesus Christ" is the unmerited favour or kindness God made available through him. God's free gift (in the person of his Son and what God accomplished through him) is an expression of his favour or kindness, bringing liberation for the many from the sin with which they had been infected. The sacrificial death of Christ was sufficient to offset past, present, and future sins, with the favor of being forgiven and reconciled to God extending to all who would avail themselves of it.

When it comes to the free gift (in the person of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation his Father effected through him) the result is very different from the consequences of Adam's sin. The adverse judgment expressed against Adam for the one transgression meant that all his descendants came under condemnation. All of them, as offspring of a condemned sinner, shared his flaw, making it impossible for any one of them to reflect the image of God faultlessly. Accordingly, "out of one [transgression]" came condemnation. The gracious gift (in the person of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation with his Father that his sacrificial death made possible), after many trespasses had been committed, brought about justification or acquittal. Thus, through the gift, "out of many trespasses" came pardon and an approved relationship with God. (5:16)

By the trespass of the one man Adam, death began to reign or exercise dominion. Thus, through the one man, death began to rule over all his descendants. That being the case, much more will the recipients of the abundant grace or unmerited favour (pardon on the basis of Christ's sacrifice) and the free gift of righteousness (a right standing with God as his approved children) reign

in life through Jesus Christ. This reigning in life is not a rule over others. As the context indicates, this is a reign free from sin and condemnation. The Greek verb for “reign” is future tense, indicating that believers would be granted the fullness of life in the sinless state. Liberated from sin in the absolute sense, they would be reigning in life, completely freed from the rule of sin. Only through Jesus Christ would such reigning in life be possible. (5:17)

“Therefore,” as Paul continued, “through one trespass” the result has been condemnation for “all men” or all members of the human family. Thus also “through one righteous act” (Jesus’ surrendering his life to make forgiveness of sins possible) “all men” could be justified “for life.” (5:18) All who embrace the arrangement for being put right with God through faith in Christ come to enjoy the real life as forgiven persons whom God approves.

Through Adam’s disobedience, “many” (meaning all but with an emphasis on the great number) came to be sinners alienated from God. So also, through Christ’s obedience, which included laying down his life sacrificially in keeping with his Father’s will, many will be made righteous or persons acquitted of their sins and reconciled to his Father as beloved children, sharing in blessings far grander than Adam enjoyed in his sinless state. (5:19)

Prior to the giving of the law, humans proved to be sinners, for they failed to conduct themselves according to their conscience, their inner sense of right and wrong. Then, upon making its entrance long after sin had done so, the law caused trespassing to multiply. On account of the law, many more attitudes and actions were identified as sins and those who failed to live up to the law stood condemned as sinners. With the law identifying many more sins, it caused sins to be manifest in far greater number than prior to its institution. The divine favour that made forgiveness possible served to negate this result from the law. As a consequence, “where sin increased, [unmerited] favor abounded much more.” (5:20)

The gracious favour or unmerited kindness God expressed in giving his Son led to pardon for sinners, reconciliation with him, and the bestowal of sonship. Forgiveness of many sins and all the blessings associated therewith meant that God’s favour abounded to a greater extent and in a more powerful way than did sin. The yield in beneficent results from this unearned kindness is far more plentiful than the crop of injuriousness that Adam’s transgression produced and which the law exposed.

Sin reigned or exercised its dominion “in death,” for all sinners are subject to death. Unearned favour, on the other hand, rules “through righteousness.” On

the basis of God's favour extended to those who put faith in Christ and the forgiveness of sins made possible through him, believers are counted as righteous or upright. Therefore, under the dominion of righteousness, the result is "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the real life of an enduring relationship with God and his Son. That permanent approved relationship constitutes the real life and is only available through the Lord Jesus Christ. (5:21)

Notes:

In verses 2 and 3 of Romans chapter 5, the Greek verb *kaucháomai* basically means to boast, to take pride in, or to glory. This is a proper taking of pride that gives all credit to God and his Son and is associated with an inner sense of joy.

Some have understood the words of Romans 5:11 about boasting in God to be linked to Romans 5:3, where the reference is to boasting or taking pride in sufferings. The thought would then be that believers not only glory in sufferings but also glory in God. Verse 3, however, is followed by numerous intervening thoughts, making this connection less likely.

Romans 6: 1-23

6:1-11 Sanctification – The method

Verses 1-10 Positional sanctification by union with Christ

"What, then, shall we say?" This relates to Paul's comments about gaining an approved standing with God by his unmerited favor and serves to introduce the next question that counters a wrong view, "Shall we continue in sin so that [unearned] favour may increase?" (6:1)

Paul's teaching about divine favour, as he mentioned previously (3:8), had been misrepresented as promoting lawlessness. Once again, the apostle emphatically rejected the idea that forgiveness on the basis of faith in Christ promotes moral corruption, saying, "Never may it be!" Believers died to sin; how then could they still continue living in it? For them to be dead to sin would mean that it no longer had any power or dominion over them. (6:2)

Paul then explained how believers died to sin. By means of a question, he reminded them that, at the time of their baptism, they were baptized into Christ and, therefore, into his death. Jesus Christ is the head of the body of believers. At the time of their baptism, the individual believers are united to him, becoming members of one community or corporate whole of which he is the

head. Thus they are baptized “into” Christ Jesus, entering into a relationship of oneness with him. The body shares in the experiences of the head. Accordingly, being baptized into Christ would also mean being baptized into his death. (6:3)

For believers to be baptized into Christ’s death would involve being buried with him. Then, just as Jesus was resurrected from the dead “through the glory of the Father,” all who are baptized into Christ’s death are raised to a newness of life. This is a life as persons forgiven of their sins or as approved children of God who, from then onward, should be walking or conducting themselves in keeping with their new identity. In the case of Jesus Christ, Paul attributed the resurrection to the “glory of the Father,” probably meaning the glorious or unparalleled great power the Father displayed when raising his Son from the dead. (6:4; compare Colossians 2:12.)

Being participants in the likeness of Jesus’ death, believers would also come to be sharers in his resurrection. In the context of baptism, they are raised to a newness of life, ceasing to be dead in trespasses and sins. (6:5; compare John 5:24; Ephesians 2:1-7.)

For believers, the “old man” of their former life is dead, having been crucified with Christ. From the standpoint of sharing in the likeness of Jesus’ death (which came about through crucifixion), believers would look upon their “body of sin” as having been killed, obligating them no longer to be slaves to sin. (6:6)

Confirming that death ends the reign or dominion of sin, Paul added, “For [the one] having died has been justified from sin.” No longer does sin have any claim on the individual. Those who are “justified from sin” do not have to answer to it as if they were still its slaves. (6:7)

While believers enjoy a newness of life, they look forward to the time when they will be united with Christ as sinless persons, enjoying the ultimate glory. With apparent reference to the future, Paul confidently spoke of the resurrection, “If, then, we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” (6:8) This sure hope of being with Christ should be evident from the purity of life that is lived in imitation of him.

To show how what happened to Christ should effect the lives of believers, Paul called attention to what they already knew. Now that Christ has been resurrected from the dead, he does not die again, and death has no dominion or power over him. (6:9) When he died, “he died to sin once for all,” but now that “he lives, he lives to God.” (6:10) Although Jesus was sinless, he died to sin in the sense that his death ended his relation to it as one who bore the sins of humanity. Never

again will he die for sinners, and so he lives fully to his Father without having to deal with sin as a sin bearer.

Verse 11 Experimental sanctification by knowledge and faith

In harmony with what Paul set forth concerning the Son of God, believers should consider themselves to be “dead to sin but living to God in Christ Jesus.” (6:11) They should not allow sin to have any power over them. Their living to God would mean conducting themselves as his obedient children. Believers are “in Christ” or at one with him as members of his body. Therefore, their living to God “in Christ” is dependent upon their remaining at one with Jesus Christ and continuing to rely on his aid and guidance.

6:12-7:6 Sanctification by grace and legalism

Verses 6:12-23 Sanctification by grace dispenses with the problem of legalism

“Therefore (because of “living to God in Christ Jesus”), believers cannot permit sin to reign or exercise dominion over their mortal bodies, obeying or yielding to the wrong desires originating from their sinful human nature. Although pardoned of their sins and enjoying an approved standing before God, believers are not sinless but are subject to wrong desires that must be resisted with divine help. (6:12)

The apostle urged believers not to make their body “members” or “parts” available for wrongdoing. Besides designating literal body members that would be involved in the sinful acts, “members” could also include abilities and capacities that would be misused. The Greek term *hóplon* can mean “weapon.” In this context, the word appears to have the more general sense of “tool” or “instrument.” Accordingly, the body members are not to function as “tools for wickedness” in the service of sin. Instead, believers should be placing themselves at God’s disposal as persons raised to life from the dead (the dead state of condemned sinners) and their body members as “tools of righteousness” for him. (6:13)

The thought of the next verse is linked with the conjunction *gár* (“for”) and includes the future tense of the verb *kyrieúo*, meaning “lord over,” “rule over,” “dominate,” or “exercise authority over.” A literal rendering of the verse would be, “For sin will not dominate you, for you are not under law but under [unmerited] favour.” (6:14)

The apostle's thought appears to be that, if believers place themselves at God's disposal and employ their body members as instruments in doing what is righteous or right, sin will not be exercising lordship over them. This is because believers are not under law. In view of their being unable to observe the law faultlessly, humans would not be liberated from sin's dominion or control. The law condemns sinners, exposing them as being the subjects of sin and deserving of punishment. Through God's unmerited favour or kindness, on the other hand, believers are reckoned as righteous on the basis of their faith in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice. No longer are they counted as condemned sinners or the subjects of sin.

"What then" is the consequence of not being under law? "Should we sin because we are not under law but under [unmerited] favour?" Paul emphatically answered this question, saying, "Never may it be!" (6:15) Having one's sins forgiven in expression of God's unearned kindness provides no excuse for living in sin. This would be contrary to the very purpose for which Jesus died, namely, to liberate humans from sin and its death-dealing effect.

Individuals who put themselves at the disposal of another to obey that one are slaves. It is their obedience that makes them such. By means of his question, Paul reminded believers that, by obeying sin, they would be slaves of sin, with resultant death. (6:16)

The apostle contrasted "obedience" with being a slave to sin but did not include an object for "obedience." (6:16) Elsewhere in this letter, he referred to "obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26), obeying the evangel (10:16), and obedience to "type of teaching" (6:17). Obedient response to the message about Jesus Christ and what he accomplished by his death could be included. Verse 13, however, indicates that God is the one to whom obedience is owing, and so the reference may be understood as applying to obedience to him. A number of translations make this significance explicit. "You can be slaves to sin and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God and be acceptable to him." (CEV) "You can follow sin, which brings spiritual death, or you can obey God, which makes you right with him." (NCV) "You *belong* to the power which you choose to obey, whether you choose sin, whose reward is death, or God, obedience to whom means the reward of righteousness." (J. B. Phillips)

The righteousness resulting from obedience may mean the approved standing those enjoy who are forgiven of sins on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and what his death accomplished. The other possibility is that it applies to the righteousness believers will come to possess upon being completely freed from sin or becoming sinless persons. When death is regarded as the ultimate

consequence for sin, the righteousness to which obedience leads (if intended as a contrasting parallel) would denote the future righteous or sinless state.

In the case of believers, Paul thanked God that, though they had been slaves to sin, they became obedient from the heart (their inmost selves) to the “type of teaching” to which they were “handed over.” The “type of teaching” could refer to teaching relating to Christ rather than Jewish teaching (with its focus on the law). Another possible meaning is teaching that provided a pattern for believers to follow and so teaching to which they became subject. If God is regarded as the one who handed believers over to this “type of teaching,” the purpose for his doing so could be so that they would learn it and live by it. (6:17)

Freed from sin, believers became slaves to righteousness, subjecting themselves to the doing of what is just and right. (6:18)

When speaking of this change in masters from “sin” to “righteousness,” Paul was merely drawing an illustration from the then-existing institution of slavery, wanting those whom he addressed to understand their new relationship and its associated responsibilities. The apostle chose to speak in human terms because of the “weakness of [their] flesh.” (6:19) This suggests that he recognized their limitations in being able to comprehend the totality of their obligations, their full accountability, and the complete extent to which they were owned on account of having been purchased with Christ’s blood. Because they were well-acquainted with everything that slavery entailed, believers had a frame of reference for the aspects of the slave status that would fit their new relationship to God and Christ.

It was incumbent upon believers to put their whole being, all the members of their body, at the disposal of the service of righteousness, subjecting themselves as would slaves to the doing of what is right. In the past, before becoming believers, they did not conduct themselves commendably. They presented their body members as slaves to uncleanness, impurity, or indecency and to lawlessness or conduct that violated the natural sense of uprightness, fairness, and propriety. In relation to the enslavement of their body members, Paul wrote, “to lawlessness into lawlessness.” (6:19) This may mean that, in their former state, believers had used their body members as slaves to lawlessness for the purpose of committing ever-greater lawlessness or moral corruption. Translators have variously rendered the words, “to greater and greater lawlessness” (HCSB), “lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” (ESV), “wickedness, for the purpose of becoming wicked” (J. B. Phillips), and “lawlessness, making for moral anarchy” (REB).

When, on the other hand, believers used their body members in the service of righteousness, the result would be “holiness.” Their life as believers would be pure or blameless. Formerly, while they had been “slaves of sin,” they were “free” in relation to righteousness, for they did not subject themselves to the doing of what was right, just, or fair. (6:19, 20)

No good came from their former enslavement to sin. The point Paul made regarding this may be punctuated in two different ways. (1) “So what were you having then [as] fruit of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” (2) “So what were you having then [as] fruit? Things of which you are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death.” They could only look upon their former corrupt way of life and actions (comparable to rotten fruit) as something of which they were ashamed. Their sinful practices had death as the ultimate end. (6:21)

As persons liberated from sin, believers are slaves of God. No longer would they be producing rotten fruit. Their new way of life would be productive of “holiness” or purity in attitude, word, and deed, with the end being eternal life. In its culmination, eternal life is an enduring relationship with God and his Son as sinless persons. (6:22)

This is the very opposite of the results from a sinful life, for death is the wages of sin. Death terminates all relationships, and the dead cannot do anything to attain an approved relationship with God and Christ. (6:23)

Eternal life is not dependent on having lived flawlessly according to the law. It is God’s gracious gift “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This can be understood to mean that eternal life is only possible through Christ Jesus because of what he accomplished by laying down his life sacrificially or that a person can only be in possession of eternal life by being “in” or at one with him as a member of his body. All who are members of his body or the community of believers recognize Jesus Christ as their Lord, which is evident from their faithfully following his example and teaching. (6:23)

Romans 7: 1-25

Verses 7: 1-6 Sanctification by grace delivers from the principle of legalism

The discussion that follows indicates that Paul referred to the law given to the Israelites. He directed his question about the binding nature of the law to those who knew it, meaning to his fellow Jewish “brothers” who believed in Christ.

They certainly were not ignorant of the fact that a man is under the dominion of or subject to the law as long as he lives. (7:1)

Developing the point about being under the law for a lifetime, Paul called attention to the relationship of a wife to her husband. As long as her husband is alive, she is bound by his law. When he dies, his law ceases to be binding. If she were to enter a relationship with another man while her husband is still alive, she would be called an adulteress. But upon her husband's death, she would be free from his law and would not be an adulteress upon becoming another man's wife. (7:2, 3)

Paul then made an application in the case of his "brothers," fellow believers who had been under the law. Through the body of Christ, they had been made dead to the law. When they put faith in him and his sacrifice for them and submitted to baptism, they were incorporated into his body and thus died with him, sharing in his experience as the head of his body. This meant that the law no longer had dominion over them, condemning them as transgressors. Freed from the law, believers could enter a new relationship that was unaffected by the former demands of the law. That new relationship was with Christ, the one who had been raised from the dead. As a result of this new relationship, the life of believers would be productive of "fruit for God." This fruit would be in the form of words and actions that honoured God to whom they had been reconciled as beloved children through their faith in his Son. (7:4)

Paul's words, "when we were in the flesh," relate to the time when believers were under the dominion of sin in their state of alienation from God and condemned as sinners by the law. At that time, the "sinful passions" (literally, "passions of sins") had been aroused through the law and were at work in the body members of the individuals. The "fruit" in the form of sinful conduct had death in view. (7:5)

When referring to "passions of sins," Paul represented "sins" as a force at work in the flesh or human nature. Through the law, all who were subject to it were made aware of wrongs that would otherwise not have been considered serious transgressions. The existence of the law exposed the working of sin in the body members. When individuals come to recognize their sinful state (to which recognition the law leads), they realize that the law is condemning them as sinners deserving of death.

For believers who had been under the law, a significant change had taken place. Now that they had been released from the law, having died to it as something

that had bound them formerly, they could slave or serve in the “newness of spirit and not [in] the old way of [the] letter.” (7:6)

7: 7-25 False sanctification – its defeat

Verses 7-14a Sanctification by grace and the law

The later emphasis on God’s spirit (8:1-17) would suggest that the “spirit” refers to the “holy spirit.” Accordingly, for one to slave in the “newness of spirit” would appear to mean to conduct oneself in the new way that is under the guidance of God’s spirit. Another possible meaning is to slave in a new spiritual manner. A number of translations are explicit in the significance they convey. “Now we can serve God in a new way by obeying his Spirit.” (CEV) “But seeing that we have died to that which once held us in bondage, the Law has now no hold over us, so that we render a service which, instead of being old and formal, is new and spiritual.” (Weymouth) Slaving according to the “old way [or obsolescence] of the letter” denotes trying to live up to the requirements of the law. The result of such slaving is failure, as it is impossible faultlessly to obey the law. (7:6)

Paul then raised the questions, “What, then, shall we say? [Is] the law sin?” In view of the law’s role in exposing sin and thereby revealing many more sins than would otherwise have been recognized, one might conclude that the law itself is sin or a failure, not producing the desired good results. The apostle Paul rejects this as a wrong conclusion, saying, “Never may it be! Rather, I would not have known sin if it had not been for the law.” (7:7)

“For,” referring to himself to illustrate the point, Paul went on to explain, “I would not have known [what] covetousness [is] if the law [Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21, LXX] had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” When the law identified covetousness as sin, those who were under the law came to know or recognize it as such. (7:7)

“Through the commandment” prohibiting covetousness, sin “received” or found occasion for producing “all kinds of covetousness in me, for apart from law sin [is] dead.” (7:8) On account of the identification of covetousness in the law, sin, as an active agent, could claim all types of wrong desires as its works. Without the law, these desires could not have been labeled as evil, and so “sin” would have been dead (not an active agent) insofar as covetousness was concerned.

The apostle spoke of himself as once living apart from law, but that, when the commandment arrived, sin came to life, and he died. (7:9) He found the commandment that was for life to be one that proved to be for death. (7:10)

Viewed from the standpoint of Paul's life, he died upon coming to a full recognition of his sinful state. He could then see that he was unable to live up to the requirements of the law and, therefore, found himself under the condemnation of death. His failure to walk faultlessly according to the law's requirements meant that sin had come to life as an active agent. He could speak of the commandment as being for life because when the law was given the Israelites were told, "Keep, then, my statutes and decrees, for the man who carries them out will find life through them." (Leviticus 18:4, NAB) The inability to observe these statutes and decrees faultlessly, however, brought condemnation, leading to death.

Paul added, "For sin, having received occasion through the commandment, seduced me and through it [the commandment] killed me." (7:11) As an active agent, sin is represented as employing the commandment for its purpose, seducing Paul to become its victim by failing to observe the commandment and killing him by having the law identify him as a sinner deserving of death.

The law, though, is not at fault, for it is holy or pure, "and the commandment [is] holy and righteous and good." (7:12) The requirements set forth in the law prohibited impure, unjust, and evil actions. So the commandment could rightly be identified as being pure and designed to promote justice and goodness.

The fact that the law was good gave rise to the question, "Did, then, the good become death for me?" Paul answered, "Never may it be!" There was nothing injurious in the good law. The killer was sin. As an active agent, sin was shown or exposed as producing death for Paul, and it did so through the good law (the law which made it possible for the works of sin to be clearly identified). Accordingly, through the commandment that revealed sin to the fullest extent, sin became more sinful than ever. (7:13)

Verses 14b – 24 False sanctification by the self-effort of legalism

When referring to the law as being "spiritual," Paul may have meant that it had a spiritual source and so was spiritual in nature, for it was a God-given law and revealed his will. The apostle, though, could speak of himself (representatively of all humans) as fleshly (or as having inclinations opposed to what is spiritual or godly). He was "sold under slavery to sin." The reference to being "sold under slavery to sin" is indicative of the mastery sinful inclinations exercised, comparable to the absolute control masters in the Greco-Roman world had over their purchased slaves. (7:14)

To convey the teaching that law cannot effect an approved standing before God, Paul referred to himself and represented “sin” or the inclination to sin as an alien entity that acted as a master against him in his desire to live up to God’s law. (Compare Romans 8:3.) That he had been “sold under slavery to sin” was evident from the reality that he did not “know” or understand his own works or actions, for he did not practice what he wanted but ended up doing what he hated. (7:15)

When doing things he did not wish, Paul agreed that “the law is good.” This is so because he wanted to live up to what the law said and recognized that its requirements were right. His real self or real “I” wanted to do what the law said, and so he was not the one doing what he hated. An alien master dwelling within him, sin or the powerful inclination to sin, was exercising control. (7:16, 17)

“For,” Paul continued, “I know that good is not dwelling in me, that is, in my flesh.” He was aware of this flaw because he had the capacity for desiring to do what was right but did not have the ability to carry it out faultlessly. Apparently for emphasis, Paul then repeated what he had already said. He did not do the good he wanted, but did the bad he did not wish to do. If, then, he did what he did not want to do, he was not the one carrying it out, but the active agent exercising the mastery was sin or the sinful inclination residing within him. (7:18-20)

In his case, Paul found a “law” or principle at work. When he wanted to do the good, the bad was right there to assert control. (7:21)

According to the man within, his real self, Paul found delight in God’s law, wanting to live up to it, but he saw or recognized another “law” or principle at work in the members of his body. That “law” or principle was in a state of war or conflict with the “law” of his mind or the mental inclination of his real “I” that wanted to do good. In this struggle, the “law” of sin or the sinful inclination as a controlling principle in his body members gained the upper hand, leading him captive. (7:22, 23)

Verse 25 True sanctification

On account of this raging conflict between the desire for good and the ever-present sinful inclinations, Paul referred to himself as a wretched or pitiable man. He wanted to be rescued from the “body of death,” that is, from the body with its sinful inclinations that lead to death. After raising the question as to who would do so, he answered it with grateful conviction, “Thanks to God through

Jesus Christ our Lord!” Through the forgiveness and reconciliation God effected by means of his Son, the rescue mission has been accomplished. (7:24, 25)

The inability to live up flawlessly to God’s law ceases to be the basis for condemnation. By faith in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished by laying down his life sacrificially, believers are accounted as upright. They are, however, not sinless in the absolute sense. As Paul said regarding himself, “So, then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but [my] flesh [is a slave] to the law of sin.” (7:25)

In desire and mental inclination, believers are subject to God’s law and seek to conduct themselves uprightly in attitude, word, and deed. The sinful inclinations, however, have not been evicted from their flesh, for they still share the sinful human condition and so are subject to the “law of sin” that is responsible for their falling short in flawlessly reflecting the purity of their heavenly Father.

Sanctification

The Bible teaching on sanctification

Largely misunderstood and abused, sanctification (a setting apart for God’s worship and service), as taught by the Scripture, is in three aspects: past, present, future. The following chart will illustrate.

Past aspect of Sanctification	Present aspect of sanctification	Future aspect of sanctification
Positional (1 Cor. 1:2, 30). All believers were so sanctified as saints, the youngest as well as the oldest, the most carnal as well as the most spiritual.	Experiential. Depends upon our knowledge of and faith in our position in Christ (Romans 6:1-11), converting our position into experience.	Final. When we see the Lord and are made like Him – sinless, sickless, deathless (1 Cor. 4; 15:54, 1 John 3:2).
Static, unalterable, inseparable from justification, and the	Progressive, changeable. Depends upon yieldedness to God’s will	Eternal. Will result in our final state in eternity (Phil

result solely of our union with Christ.	(Romans 6:13) and conformity to God's Word (Romans 12:2).	3:21).
As God sees us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 30, with Phil. 1:1, etc.).	As we are in our conduct (2 Thess. 2:13)	As we shall be in glory (Romans 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49).)

Romans 8: 1-39

8:1-25 True sanctification – its victory

Verses 1-4 The new law.

In view of what God has done through his Son, those who are “in Christ Jesus,” being at one with him as members of his body, are “now” not under condemnation. In the past, while under the law, condemnation resulted from failing to live up faultlessly to the law’s requirements. “Now,” however, through their faith in Christ Jesus and the atoning benefits of his death for them, believers are accounted as approved. Being members of the body of which the Son of God is the head, they share in his righteousness as the one who has always been without sin. Later manuscripts add that those in Christ Jesus “do not walk according to the flesh, but according to [the] spirit.” (8:1; see 8:4, where this basic phrase is found.)

The apostle added an explanatory comment about why those in Christ are not under condemnation. “For the law of the spirit of the life in Christ Jesus has freed you [singular you; other manuscripts read ‘me’ or ‘us’] from the law of sin and of death.” In this case, law designates a governing principle or power. Accordingly, “the law of the spirit” could refer to the controlling principle or power either of the holy spirit or of the individual’s spirit that has been made new through the operation of God’s spirit. The link of the spirit to life may be understood to mean that the spirit is a life-giving principle or power for the individual who is “in” or at one with Christ Jesus or that the spirit is the controlling principle in the new life of the person who is united to Christ as a member of his body. With a new power controlling and guiding believers, they are liberated from the “law” or controlling power of sin and of death (the inevitable consequence of sin and to which sinners are subject as they would be to law). (8:2)

The “law,” meaning (as the context indicates) God’s law given through Moses, could not effect liberation from sin and death. Its powerlessness in this respect stemmed from its being “weak through the flesh.” The “flesh” or the human condition in its sinful state robbed the law of the capacity to reveal individuals as faultlessly upright and deserving of life. God himself stepped in, doing what the law could never succeed in bringing about. He sent his own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin” to condemn sin in the flesh. (8:3)

Jesus Christ was fully human and as such did not differ from other humans. He came, however, only in the “*likeness* of sinful flesh,” for he was wholly without sin as a human. (8:3)

God sent his Son “concerning sin,” having him lay down his life sacrificially to make forgiveness of sins possible. Through his Son, the Father “condemned sin in the flesh.” This may mean that God exposed sin as an alien element in the flesh and deprived it of its controlling power in the case of those who believe in his Son. (8:3)

As to the purpose this condemnation of sin in the flesh served, Paul continued, “that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who are walking, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.” (8:4)

Verse 5-25 The new victory

The obligations the law imposed were right or just. In the case of believers, their conduct harmonizes with these “just requirements,” for they are not living corrupt lives. So what the law commands is fulfilled in them. Their ceasing to walk “according to the flesh” or their sinful nature or inclinations is not attributable to an externally imposed demand to adhere to the law. Their walk or conduct is “according to the spirit.” So, because they are allowing themselves to be guided by God’s spirit, they are living the purpose of the law (which finds its full expression in love for God and fellow humans) and thus conducting themselves in agreement with its just requirements.

Those who remain fleshly persons, continuing in an unconverted state and without the help of God’s spirit, persist in living “according to the flesh” or their sinful inclinations. Their minds are on the things of the flesh or on its prompting and craving. Believers who live “according to the spirit,” living spiritual lives under the guidance of God’s spirit, have their minds on the things of the spirit. Their mental focus is on the things that are in harmony with the holy spirit’s direction and guidance. (8:5)

The outcomes for centring the thoughts on the flesh or on the spirit are very different. When the flesh is the focus or concern of the mind, allowing its sinful desires to control one's life, the ultimate end is death. In the case of those whose mind is centred on the spirit, letting it govern, the result is "life and peace." This life is the real life of an approved relationship with the heavenly Father and his Son. No longer are those whom God's spirit guides at enmity with the Father. They are reconciled to him as his beloved children and enjoy peace with him and are assured of his loving help and care. (8:6)

The reason that a focus on the flesh, the inclination to satisfy its sinful cravings, can only lead to death is that the sinful nature is at enmity with God. This sinful inclination or flesh is not subject to God's law and cannot be, for it is in a state of rebellion against the spirit of the law that finds its fulfilment in love for God and fellow humans. Therefore, those who are "in the flesh," persons dominated by their sinful human nature, cannot please God. (8:7, 8)

To believers in Rome, Paul could say, "But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, provided the spirit of God is residing in you." As the sinful human nature was no longer in control, believers could be spoken of as not being "in the flesh." They are "in the spirit," and this is introduced by a marker of strong contrast (but, *allá*). A craving to satisfy sinful desires no longer dominates their lives. Their spirit, under the impelling power of God's spirit, motivates them to conduct themselves uprightly. Therefore, the sphere of their life is, not "in the flesh," but "in the spirit." This is "provided" (literally, "if") the "spirit of God resides" in them. The Greek term for "resides" or "dwells" is in the present tense and so would be indicative of a continuing presence of God's spirit as the governing power in the lives of believers. (8:9)

Paul added, "But if anyone does not have Christ's spirit, this one is not his." (8:9) The apostle may here have been using "Christ's spirit" as synonymous with God's spirit, for it is through Christ that the holy spirit is imparted to believers. (Compare Acts 2:33.) The spirit of Christ could also denote the same spirit that he manifests, for his every act is in full harmony with his Father's will and spirit. Persons who are not guided by the spirit of Christ demonstrate that they do not belong to him. They are not members of his body.

For Christ to be in believers would mean that he would be at one with them and they with him. When this is the case, the "body" (from the standpoint of its sinful nature) is "dead because of sin, but the spirit [is] alive because of righteousness." (8:10) On account of sin, the body is still subject to death. Believers, though, share in Christ's righteousness, for they are accounted as divinely approved on the basis of their faith in him and his surrender of his life

for them. This has made it possible for them to be recipients of God's spirit and to enjoy a newness of life. Guided and directed by the holy spirit, they are not dead in trespasses and sins but live as God's approved children, with the eternal sinless state in prospect.

The spirit powerfully at work in believers is the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. When the holy spirit has a permanent home in believers, the Father, through the spirit residing in them, will "also" (not in all manuscripts) impart life to their mortal bodies. There are two different Greek manuscript readings (*diá toú enoikoúntos* [genitive case] *autoú pneúmatoς en hymín* ["through the indwelling of his spirit in you"] and *diá tó enoikoún* [accusative case] *autoú pneúma en hymín* ["because of the indwelling of his spirit in you"]). The genitive construction points to the spirit as the agency through which the new life is imparted, whereas the accusative construction expresses the reason for a future granting of life to be the indwelling of the spirit. (8:11)

Being persons enjoying a newness of life through the operation of God's spirit within them, Paul and his brothers or fellow believers were not in debt to the flesh. They were not obligated to satisfy the cravings of their human nature, living "according to the flesh" or conducting themselves in a manner that their sinful human condition craved. (8:12)

For them to live "according to the flesh" or according to the prompting of their sinful human nature would lead to death, for they would be conducting themselves contrary to the liberation from sin and death that Jesus had effected by dying sacrificially for them. If, though, they followed the spirit's direction, they would be killing the practices of the body, that is, the corrupt ways in which the sinful inclinations of the body were ever-ready to assert themselves. This would mean life for them, as they would continue to live a newness of life as God's beloved children. (8:13)

All who let themselves be led by God's spirit are his sons or members of his beloved family. (8:14) They are free "sons of God," for they have not received a spirit of slavery resulting in their again having fear (as would one in a state of slavery who obeys his master out of fear). Under the law arrangement, those who were subject to it were reminded of their failings and so did have fear of the consequences. The execution of the penalties the law prescribed were to induce fear as a preventive measure, serving as a warning to all as to what could happen to them if they became guilty of the same offenses. (8:15; Deuteronomy 6:13-15, 24; 13:6-11; 17:12, 13; 19:16-20; 21:20, 21)

Using a strong marker of contrast (*allá*, meaning “but”), Paul continued, “But you received a spirit of sonship.” This “spirit of sonship” makes it possible for them to have a strong inner conviction that their heavenly Father deeply loves them and will continue to care for them. (8:15)

In keeping with this spirit of sonship, the divinely granted conviction of being approved sons on the basis of faith in Christ, “We cry out, Abba, Father.” The transliterated designation “Abba” (*abbá*) imitates one of the initial simple sounds a baby makes and so can convey the intimacy, submission, trust, and affection of a young child when saying “papa” or “daddy.” In the Greek text, *abbá* is followed by *ho patér* (“the Father”). The context does not suggest that *ho patér* serves to define *abbá*. Therefore, evidently to be regarded as a vocative, *ho patér* could be translated “O Father.” The term “Father” fittingly expresses the believer’s relationship to God as a son and the privileges and responsibilities associated therewith. (8:15)

God’s spirit operating within them testifies with their own spirit (their conviction, inclination, and disposition) that they are his children. Their own spirit is fully receptive to the Holy Spirit, confirming that they are members of their heavenly Father’s family. (8:16)

As children of God, they are also his heirs, with a marvellous inheritance in prospect. They are joint heirs with Christ. The Father granted his Son, upon the completion of his earthly course in faithfulness, all authority in heaven and on earth as his inheritance. With Christ, believers will share in the blessings that this inheritance makes possible. As was true in his case, they undergo distress. (Compare Mark 8:34, 35; Hebrews 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:16; 5:9, 10.) Being members of Christ’s body, they are participants in his suffering. As fellow sufferers while remaining faithful to God, they are assured of becoming fellow sharers in glory, enjoying the blessings associated with the sinless state of God’s family of children and being able to reflect his image flawlessly for all eternity. (8:17)

Upon being united to Christ, believers will share his glory or splendor, coming to be like him and seeing him as the magnificent and flawless reflection of his Father’s very being. (Compare Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 3:1-3.) Therefore, Paul regarded the “sufferings of the present time,” or the distress and affliction believers endure on account of their being Christ’s disciples, as not even worth comparing with the transcendent glory to be revealed in them. So surpassingly great will be the magnificence of what they will be granted that the pains and trials of the past will not amount to anything. (8:18)

Human sinfulness has had a damaging effect on the whole environment, with resultant harm to plant and animal life. Seemingly, for this reason, Paul referred to the creation as waiting with eager longing for “the revelation of the sons of God.” This would be when believers are revealed in their glorified state as persons free from sin, ushering in a new era that would bring an end to the baneful effects human sinfulness has had on the whole creation. (8:19)

The outworking of God’s condemnation of human sinfulness also meant that the creation came to be subjected to futility, sharing in the pain and suffering that would otherwise not have existed. (Compare Jeremiah 4:23-26; 14:1-7; 23:10.) It was not of its own will or choice that the creation was subjected to such a vain, futile, or empty existence, but God subjected it, not shielding it from the ruinous impact of human sinfulness. Nevertheless, though God thus willed matters, he did so on the basis of the “hope that also the creation itself will be liberated from the slavery of ruin [to share] in the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (8:20, 21) The futile condition of the creation was not to continue, but the God-given hope assured that it would end. When the “children of God” are revealed in the magnificence of their sinless state, the whole creation would be freed from the bondage in which it shared on account of God’s adverse judgment of human sinfulness. The creation would then cease to undergo senseless devastation and ruin.

As to the present condition of the creation, Paul said, “For we know that all the creation is groaning together and is pained [as in childbirth] together until now.” (8:22) It appears that, based on what he and fellow believers could observe all around them, they knew or were aware of a world in a state of ruin and decay. Especially would this have been a stark reality in times of war and famine. Even in the case of what today would be perceived as “natural disasters,” human sinfulness often contributes to an intensification of the harmful effects on the whole environment. The ruin and devastation present a mournful spectacle, making it appropriate to speak of the whole creation as groaning and being in pain on account of the unfavourable circumstances that can be attributed to human sinfulness.

“But not only” is the whole creation in this state, “but also the very ones having the firstfruits of the spirit — also we ourselves groan within our very selves, awaiting sonship [adoption as sons], the redemption of our body.” It appears that the spirit is being identified as the firstfruits, providing a foretaste of the fulness of sonship that believers will come to enjoy. (8:23; see the Notes section for additional comments and another possible meaning of “firstfruits of the spirit.”)

A number of translations paraphrase the words about the spirit to convey an explicit significance. “And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension.” (J. B. Phillips) “What is more, we also, to whom the Spirit is given as the firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly.” (REB) “We have the Spirit as the first part of God’s promise.” (NCV) In Ephesians 1:14, the spirit is designated as the *arrabón* or the “first instalment” of the inheritance, serving as a pledge to assure believers of the inheritance that is still in prospect for them as God’s approved sons.

Despite being so highly favoured by having the spirit operating powerfully within them, believers still groan inwardly. This is because they are not fully liberated from the human weaknesses and inclinations that prevent them from reflecting the image of their heavenly Father faultlessly. The adoption for which they are earnestly waiting is their being constituted sinless sons or children of God. This requires redemption or liberation from the body in which the sinful inclinations are still at work.

Linking “hope” to salvation, Paul continued, “For in hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope; for does one hope for what one sees?” The redemption of the body is yet future, and so the fullness of salvation is not yet the believer’s possession but is in prospect. Accordingly, the believer lives in hope of obtaining the salvation Christ’s sacrificial death made possible. Upon putting faith in Christ and what he did for them, believers received the spirit as the first instalment that provided a solid basis for the hope of salvation. So, not in full possession, but, in hope, they were saved. Hope is no longer necessary when the object of one’s hope is seen as one’s personal possession. (8:24; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

“If, however,” as the apostle added, “we do not see for what we hope, we wait with endurance.” (8:25) For believers, the hope has as yet not been transformed into full possession. This requires that they steadfastly wait for the fulfilment of their hope (full sonship in the sinless state).

8: 26-38 True sanctification – its assurance.

Verses 26-27 True sanctification

When enduring trials or distress and patiently waiting for the fulfillment of their hope, believers find themselves in a quandary about just what they need to do or what to request in prayer. At such time, God’s spirit comes to their aid, supporting them in their weakness. Although they themselves may not know how to pray as would be necessary under the circumstances, the spirit intercedes

with “unuttered groans” or with sighs that are not expressed in words or audibly. On account of the working of God’s spirit within them, believers sigh or react inwardly to what they are facing. (8:26)

Our heavenly Father, who searches the hearts or the deep inner selves, understands the spirit-induced groaning or sighing (the minding or longing of the spirit). This sighing, to which the spirit gives rise, is “according to God for holy ones.” In being “according to God,” the sighing harmonizes with his will and constitutes a plea for aid to holy ones or believers who are “holy” or pure because of their faith in Christ and their life of faith. (8:27)

Verses 28-34 True sanctification – its assurance.

The assurance of help even when unable to formulate an appropriate petition in prayer is not the only reason believers have for confidence in times of distress. In their case, as persons who love God, all things work together for their good. According to another manuscript reading, “God makes all things work together for their good” or, “in all things, God works for good.” The “all things” would include suffering or distress, which, when faithfully endured, produces a stronger faith, one of tested quality. Paul also referred to those who love God as being “called ones according to his purpose.” God had purposed to direct a call or invitation to humans to be his beloved children. As those who responded to the call, accepting his arrangement for having their sins forgiven and being reconciled to him on the basis of their faith in his Son and his laying down his life for them, they proved to be “called ones.” (8:28)

God foreknew that there would be persons who would love him, and he predestined, foreordained, or predetermined that they would be conformed to the “image of his Son” or would come to be like him as fellow sons. This would make it possible for a large family of “sons” to come into being, with the unique Son being the “firstborn” or preeminent one among “many brothers” or many of God’s children. (8:29)

When the time came for humans to become part of this family, the family he had predestined or predetermined to come into being, God extended his call to them, inviting them to abandon a life focused on indulging their sinful desires and to do his will as obedient children. Individuals who responded in faith to his Son and the forgiveness of sins made possible through him were justified or accounted as “righteous” or approved. Those whom God thus justified he also “glorified,” granting them the dignity of being his beloved sons under his care and protection. Yet ahead is the bestowal of the full glory or splendor — the status of sinless sons who flawlessly reflect the image of his unique Son. (8:30)

In view of all that God has done, Paul raised the questions, “What, then, can we say regarding these things? If God is for us, who [can be] against us?” The implied answer to the second question points to the only thing that can be added. With God on the side of believers, no one can have success in opposing them or in inflicting lasting harm. (8:31)

Our heavenly Father has already made the supreme sacrifice, the sacrifice which believers have, in faith, appreciatively accepted. “He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for all of us,” making it possible for believers to be forgiven of their sins, to be reconciled to him, and to become recipients of his tender care and deep love. In view of the supreme sacrifice our heavenly Father has made for us in expression of his love, how could we possibly doubt that he, with his Son, would also graciously grant us everything we might need as his beloved children? This assures us that he will come to our aid in times of distress. (8:32)

Can anyone bring a legitimate accusation against God’s chosen ones that would disqualify them from being recipients of his gracious gifts? No, for God himself has justified them, accounting them as approved on the basis of their faith in his Son and what he accomplished by his sacrificial death. (8:33)

Can anyone rightly condemn believers, rendering an adverse judgment that would deprive them of God’s love and protective care? No, for Christ Jesus died for them. More than that, the Son of God is alive. He was raised from the dead and is now at his Father’s right hand. In the favoured position as his Father’s intimate and dearly beloved, Christ Jesus can and does plead our cause. (8:34)

Verses 35-39 True sanctification – its climatic triumph

Nothing will stop the Son of God from interceding for believers, for nothing will separate them from his love. The apostle Paul highlighted this in question form. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? [Can] affliction or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword?” (8:35) When people come to see that the unfavorable circumstances of friends could endanger their personal welfare or safety, they may fearfully withdraw and cease to be supportive and caring. Never will this be the case with the one who laid down his life for us. Regardless of the hardships, threats, or dangers believers may face, Jesus Christ will continue to be there for them as their loyal friend.

The circumstances of believers may prove to be severe, fitting the description of Psalm 44:22 (43:23, LXX), “For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were accounted as sheep for slaughter.” (8:36) “All day” or continually, believers may experience suffering because of being God’s people.

Hateful opposers may treat them like defenceless sheep fit for slaughter (not humanely as fellow humans).

Despite the trials and hardships believers were then enduring, Paul could say, “But in all these things, we are triumphing through him who has loved us.” This is because nothing separated them from the love of Christ. With his help, they were victorious or able to endure affliction and distress in faithfulness. (8:37)

Paul expressed the conviction that neither death, life, angels, governments, things then existing, things to come, powers, height, depth, nor any other creation would be able to separate believers from “the love of God which [is] in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:38, 39)

Neither the violent death with which persecutors might threaten believers nor their assurance that they could live if they denied their faith would succeed in effecting a rift with Christ. Though angels possess greater power than do humans, it would not be strong enough to separate believers from divine love, and no earthly governmental authority could do so. Nothing that then existed or might yet come into being could cut them off from divine love. No power whatsoever could force a separation. It did not matter whether that power existed in the height (the superhuman element of darkness in the spirit realm) or the depth (Hades or the realm of the dead). Nothing whatsoever in all creation could effect a separation from “the love of God that [is] in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As the express image of his Father, Jesus perfectly reflects his Father’s love. This love is “in” him, fully occupying his inmost being. As is true of his Father, Jesus is love in his very nature. With God on the side of believers and Jesus intercession for them, believers are assured of victory regardless of what they may have to face.

Notes:

Certain manuscripts contain a shorter reading for Romans 8:23. The reference to “sonship” or “adoption” is omitted, and the concluding part of the text reads, “awaiting the redemption of our body.”

Early believers may perhaps be represented as having the “firstfruits of the spirit” (Romans 8:23) from the standpoint of their having experienced the first or initial outpouring of God’s spirit, indicating that, in the future, a much larger number of believers would receive the spirit.

The Greek term for “save” (*sózo*) can also mean “preserve.” This allows for the words, “in hope we were saved” (Romans 8:24), to mean that believers were preserved by their hope, for their hope sustained them and enabled them to remain faithful to God and Christ while undergoing trials and distress.

Depending on the Greek manuscript reading, the concluding phrase in Romans 8:24 can express two different meanings. (1) “Who hopes for what one sees?” (2) “Why wait for what one sees?”

Romans 9: 1-33

9: 1-13 God’s past purpose in Israel – her position

Verses 1-5 Israel’s national position.

Romans 9-11 is parenthetical. In the unfolding of the gospel of grace, what about the Jew? The gospel as ‘the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes’ had been announced in the apostle’s theme (1:16) to be ‘first for the Jew.’ When commenting on the unbelief of fellow Jews, Paul used very strong language. He referred to those who adamantly rejected Christ as having killed him and acting against the interests of all humans through their efforts to prevent the glad tidings about him from being proclaimed to the Gentiles. (1 Thessalonians 2:14, 15) The apostle’s words likely prompted his detractors to accuse him of having turned against his own people. Paul, however, left no doubt about the depth of concern and love he had for fellow Jews. He solemnly declared, “I am speaking the truth in Christ; I am not lying. My conscience testifies to me in holy spirit, that I have much grief and unceasing pain in my heart.” (9:1, 2)

The Son of God is the embodiment of the truth, being the one who fully revealed his Father. As a believer “in” or at one with Christ who always expressed the truth, Paul could not possibly be lying. Moreover, his conscience, enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, attested how he felt about his fellow countrymen. He was grieved that they were missing out on the privileges and blessings that would result from their responding in faith to Jesus Christ. In his heart or his inmost self, Paul was continually pained because of this.

He would have been willing to do anything possible to help fellow Jews, his “brothers” or “relatives according to the flesh,” become reconciled to God through his Son. Paul would have been willing to sacrifice for them to the point of being declared “anathema,” a cursed one, or an outcast from Christ for their sake. (9:3)

The apostle sincerely felt this way because of who his Jewish “brothers” were and on account of the privileges they did and could have. They were “Israelites,” God’s people. (Deuteronomy 7:6) Sonship, glory, the covenants, the law, sacred service at the sanctuary, and the promises were all theirs. (9:4)

As a people, their forefathers had been divinely declared to be God’s firstborn son. (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9) Because of having been adopted as a firstborn son, they came to share in other privileges and blessings.

Of all the nations, they alone experienced an awesome manifestation of divine glory at Mount Sinai. This glory appeared to them like a consuming fire on the summit of the mountain. (Exodus 24:16, 17) The glory could also include God’s dwelling representatively among his people at the sanctuary. (Exodus 25:8; 40:34-38; Deuteronomy 4:7; 2 Chronicles 5:13, 14; compare 1 Samuel 4:21, 22.)

Paul did not identify the specific covenants. One of them would have been the covenant God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai after their departure from Egypt. (Exodus 24:3-8; 1 Kings 8:9) Another covenant would have been the one he concluded many decades earlier with their ancestor Abraham, assuring him that in his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 15:9-21; 22:16-18; Acts 3:25) The covenant with David revealed that the Messiah would come through his line of descent, and so it may also have been one of the covenants Paul had in mind. (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3, 4; compare Luke 1:32.)

Only the Israelites were given the law, which stood out prominently among the laws existing among other nations. (Exodus 24:12) In Deuteronomy 4:8 (REB), Moses is quoted as telling the people, “What great nation is there whose statutes and laws are so just, as is all this code of laws which I am setting before you today?”

The Israelites were unique in having an arrangement for worship that God had authorized. It included a divinely appointed priesthood, sacrifices, and annual festivals, and a sanctuary and associated items made according to divinely given specifications. (Hebrews 8:5; 9:1-7)

The promises focused on the coming of the “seed,” the Messiah, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and, finally, through the royal line of David the son of Jesse and all the blessings that would result. (Genesis 12:2, 3; 17:19; 25:23; 28:12-16; 49:9, 10; Isaiah 11:1-10)

The “fathers” or ancestors of the Israelites were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “According to the flesh” or natural descent, they were also the ones through

whom Christ came. (Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:34) This was indeed the greatest honor. Because God was the source of everything that made the Israelites stand out as different among the nations, Paul appears to have been moved to make an expression of thanks, “[May] God, the one over all, [be] blessed forever [literally, into the ages]. Amen.” (9:5; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

Verses 6-13 Israel’s spiritual election

In view of Paul’s focus on those who had been called or invited to be reconciled to God through Christ, the question logically arose about why so few of the Jews, who had been highly privileged and were the first to receive the invitation, responded in faith. Did this mean that the word of God had failed, not succeeding in accomplishing the purpose for which it was directed to the Jews? Paul’s answer was, No. He explained, “For not all [who are] out of Israel [are truly] Israel.” (9:6)

Natural descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel [Genesis 32:28]) did not make one an Israelite in the real sense of the word. The name “Israel” may be defined as “contender with God” or “God contends,” implying a relationship with God, and that relationship did not come into being on the basis of natural descent. Using historical examples, Paul established this point.

Abraham fathered Ishmael and, after the death of Sarah, had six sons by Keturah (Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah). (Genesis 16:15, 16; 25:1, 2) Although Ishmael was Abraham’s firstborn, Isaac is the one whom God designated as Abraham’s “seed.” (9:7) Thus not all the “seed” or offspring of Abraham were his children or like him in their relationship to God, but, as Abraham was told, “In Isaac will seed for you be called.” (Genesis 21:12, LXX) Accordingly, as Paul added, “The children of the flesh” (mere offspring of the procreative function) are not the “children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” (9:8)

God is the one who made the promise to Abraham, conveying his “word of promise” through his representative angel, “At this time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” (9:9; compare Genesis 18:10, 14) As a son of God’s promise, Isaac had a relationship with God (as did his father) and, therefore, was a true son of Abraham.

Paul next called attention to another case. Rebekah conceived twins by her husband Isaac. Before the fraternal twin boys were born and neither one of them

had done anything good or bad, Rebekah received a divine revelation, “The elder will serve the younger.” This indicated that the one to be born first would not be the preeminent one in God’s purpose. Commenting on this development, Paul added parenthetically, that, with reference to election or choosing, God’s purpose might continue, not “out of” or on the basis of works, but “out of” or by his calling. (9:10-12)

Neither one of the twins had done any works that provided a basis for the divine choice. Isaac, too, had no works that would have merited God’s choosing, for he was not even conceived at the time the divine promise was given to Abraham. Therefore, as Paul noted in connection with Jacob and Esau, God’s choosing continued to be independent of works. In his foreknowledge, God chose the twin that would best serve his purpose. The later history confirmed that Esau and his descendants would not have been suitable. They chose not to have a relationship with God, and merited the divine judgment expressed centuries later in Malachi 1:2, 3, “I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau.” (9:13)

9:14-33 God’s past purpose in Israel – His sovereignty

Verse 14 An objection offered

Paul anticipated that the manner in which God deals would give rise to questions about his justice. “What, then, shall we say?” the apostle continued. “Is there not injustice on God’s part?” Paul then categorically rejected such a charge, “Never may it be!” (9:14)

Verses 15-29 The objection answered – God’s righteous sovereignty.

As the Creator, God has every right to act according to his purpose. Paul backed this up with words Moses is quoted as saying and which words represent an expression of God’s choosing (Exodus 33:19, LXX), “I will be merciful to whomever I may be merciful, and I will be compassionate to whomever I may be compassionate.” (9:15)

Ultimately, the divine prerogative or purpose is the deciding factor in God’s election or choosing. Therefore, as Paul summed up, it is not dependent on the one wishing (or desiring a certain outcome) or the one running (or pursuing with a view to obtaining on the basis of merit) but on God who has mercy. (9:16)

To prove this, Paul called attention to God’s words directed to Pharaoh, “For this [purpose] I have raised you up [you have been kept (Exodus 9:16, LXX)], that I may show my power in you and that my name may be declared in all the earth.” (9:17)

Pharaoh had been “raised up” or allowed to be elevated to his position of power. According to the reading of the Septuagint, he had been kept or spared from having divine judgment immediately executed against him. This served God’s purpose to have his own power revealed in Pharaoh, with Pharaoh being the means for achieving this purpose. God did so by using Pharaoh’s repeated defiance as the occasion for bringing devastating plagues upon the land of Egypt, which plagues demonstrated the matchless power that no human might could resist. Additionally, this served God’s purpose to make his name known far beyond the borders of the land of Egypt. What befell Pharaoh and the Egyptians became widely known, and the name of the God of the Hebrews (YHWH) continued to be associated with it even in later years. (Joshua 2:10, 11; 9:9; 1 Samuel 4:8)

Applying the significance of the developments involving Pharaoh, Paul continued, “So, then, he [God] is merciful to whom he wishes, but hardens whomever he wishes.” (9:18) In the case of the Israelites in Egypt, God chose to show mercy to them and brought about their liberation. This was not because they merited his favourable attention, for they had defiled themselves with idolatrous practices in Egypt. The choosing served his purpose and fulfilled the promise he had made to their ancestors. God acted for the sake of his name, revealing himself to be deserving of unqualified trust. (Deuteronomy 4:20, 37, 38; 7:7-11; Ezekiel 20:4-10; 23:3, 8)

As for hardening, this occurred in connection with Pharaoh. The miraculous signs and the devastating plagues did not move him to yield and voluntarily allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. Instead, YHWH’s action produced a hardening response in Pharaoh, for he obstinately persisted in his defiant stance and refused to obey YHWH’s command respecting his people. (Exodus 5:2-9; 7:3, 9-13, 20-22; 8:5-32; 9:1-35; 10:1-27)

Again Paul anticipated an objection. “You will say to me, Why, then [not in all manuscripts], does he [God] still find fault? For who can resist his will?” (9:19) If all is dependent on God and human merit is excluded when it comes to having his favour, why would he still find fault with the way in which individuals conduct themselves? No one is in any position successfully to oppose what he has purposed. When raising this objection, Paul did not here include the point about the choice that humans can make of either yielding to God’s will or setting themselves defiantly against it. The apostle’s development of the subject, however, does so by implication.

With personal merit not being the determining factor, someone might question God’s justice or fairness. All humans are flawed and so should not all be granted

the same favourable treatment? Paul addressed this implied objection. “O man, who really are you to be talking back to God? Will the thing fashioned say to the one fashioning [it], Why have you made me this way? Or does not the potter have the right” to do what he wants with the clay, making both a vessel for noble purposes and one for ignoble or ordinary purposes from the same lump? (9:20, 21; compare Isaiah 29:16; 45:9.)

These questions suggest that, if God’s dealings with humans result in two very different kinds of vessels, this is not to be attributed to any injustice on his part. No human has any merit that would of necessity limit the kind of vessel or person the divine moulding should produce. As the Maker or Potter, God deals according to his purpose, which is not dictated by humans, the “clay.”

The question Paul next raised is not grammatically complete. It does, though, set forth the nature of the divine moulding process. God has every right to express his wrath and to reveal his great power, acting swiftly against those who deserve punishment. Instead, he has patiently put up with humans who have proved to be “vessels” deserving of wrath and fit for destruction. This patient endurance on his part has served his purpose to “make known the riches of his glory to vessels of mercy, which he has previously prepared for glory — us, whom he called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.” (9:22-24) In every generation that has passed since the first century CE, God’s patience with “vessels of wrath” or persons deserving to have his wrath expressed against them has provided the opportunity for individuals to respond, either hardening themselves in defiant unbelief or responding in faith to the provision he has made through his Son to be reconciled to him as his beloved children.

That divine patience serves as the moulding process, providing an opportunity for individuals to submit in faith to God’s will or to resist it, is confirmed in the prophecy of Jeremiah. The prophet observed a potter reworking a spoiled vessel into another vessel that met his approval. The word of YHWH then came to Jeremiah, revealing the significance of what he had seen. “Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it.” (Jeremiah 18:2-10, NRSV)

The same reason for divine patience is found in 2 Peter 3:9. God is not slow about fulfilling his promise, but he is patient, not wanting anyone to be destroyed but desiring “all to come to repentance.”

It is to those who come to repentance that God extends mercy. They are the “vessels of mercy” or persons who come to be the recipients of divine compassion. To them, God has made known “the riches of his glory.” He is the possessor of matchless glory, dignity, or majesty and is in position lavishly to bestow blessings of incomparable grandeur. Nothing can equal sonship and the fatherly care and love that being part of his family includes. (9:23)

Paul could refer to “vessels of mercy” as having been “previously prepared for glory,” for God had determined beforehand that all who would come to be his approved children would share the glory of his unique Son who flawlessly reflects his image. (9:23)

The divine calling to be reconciled to him as his children had not been limited to a particular people or nation. The invitation had been extended not only to Jews but also to non-Jewish peoples (the “nations”). (9:24)

Paul backed up his statement regarding the divine calling from the Scriptures. He first quoted from Hosea, “I will call those [who are] not my people, ‘my people’; and her [who was] not beloved, ‘beloved.’” (Hosea 2:23[25]; Romans 9:25) “And it will be in the place, where it was said to them, ‘You [are] not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Hosea 1:10 [2:1], LXX; Romans 9:26)

Although the words of the quotation from Hosea 2:23(25) are not the same in Romans 9:25, they are in harmony with the message conveyed through the prophet. In the original setting, these words applied to the Israelites of the ten-tribe kingdom. As a result of their pursuit of idolatry and their disregard for God’s law, they were no longer God’s people and, in this respect, resembled the non-Jewish peoples. YHWH’s rejection of the unfaithful Israelites did not permanently cut them off from the possibility of being reconciled to him. By implication, this did not forever debar others who were not God’s people from coming to be such and so also objects of his love.

The part of Hosea (1:10 [2:1]), which is quoted in Romans 9:26, corresponds to the language of the Septuagint. In Hosea 1:10 (2:1), the Hebrew word *maqóm* and the corresponding Greek word *tópos* basically mean “place.” There is a strong possibility that the phrase “in the place” is being used idiomatically to

mean “in the place of” or “instead of.” (See the Notes section for additional comments on Romans 9:26.)

The apparent application Paul made of Hosea 1:10 (2:1) relates to the Gentiles who formerly were not a part of God’s people (just as the idolatrous Israelites in the ten-tribe kingdom had ceased to be his people). Nevertheless, to the non-Jewish people, the opportunity would be extended to become “sons of the living God.”

Focusing on Israel, Paul quoted from Isaiah, “Though the number of the sons of Israel may be as the sand of the sea, [only] the remnant will be saved. For a word [the] Lord will carry out on earth, finishing and shortening [it].” In quoting from Isaiah 10:22, 23, Paul made it clear that one should not expect all who are Israelites by natural descent to become sharers in the blessings God has promised to his people. After the foretold exile, only a remnant of the far larger number of Israelites (likened to the sand of the sea) repently returned to YHWH. In keeping with past history, only a remnant would be saved and share in the inheritance of all whom God recognizes as his approved children. (9:27, 28; see the Notes section for additional comments on 9:28.)

To highlight the comparatively small number who would make up this remnant, Paul quoted from Isaiah 1:9, “If the Lord Sabaoth [Lord (YHWH, Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah) of hosts] had not left us a seed [survivors], we would have become like Sodom and made to resemble Gomorrah.” In the time of Isaiah, the enemy invaders decimated the population of Judah to such an extent that, had it not been for divine intervention, the destruction would have been as complete as that of Sodom and Gomorrah centuries earlier. (9:29)

Verses 30-33 Israel’s rejection of God’s righteousness

Based on what he had presented, Paul raised the question, “What, then, shall we say?” The apparent thought is: What conclusion should be drawn from the record in the holy writings? People of the non-Jewish nations did not pursue the way of righteousness by striving to observe the law, for it had not been given to them. Yet, among them were those who attained righteousness or an approved standing with God “out of faith,” putting their trust in God and the provision he had made through his Son for their sins to be forgiven. (9:30)

Israelites, however, did pursue the “law of righteousness,” endeavouring to conform to it. Being the “law of righteousness,” its commands were right or just. As flawed humans, the Israelites did not “attain to the law,” for they were unable

to live up to its requirements and to act in harmony with the purpose for which it had been given. (9:31)

Setting forth the reason for their failure, Paul explained that it was because of pursuing the law, “not out of faith, but “as out of works.” The source of the problem was that their efforts did not rely on faith in God. Their striving to observe the law did not have its origin in faith, but they relied on their own efforts, seeking to be divinely approved through conformity to the letter of the law.

This emphasis on the role of human effort proved to be an obstacle in recognizing their hopeless sinful state and looking to the provision God had made through his Son for forgiveness of their sins and the attainment of an acceptable standing before him. They, as Paul continued, “stumbled over the stone of stumbling,” the one Isaiah represented YHWH as laying in Zion, “Look! I am laying in Zion a stone [occasioning] stumbling and a rock [causing] falling, and the one believing on him will not be put shame.” (9:32, 33)

The quotation in Romans 9:33 is drawn in part from Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16. YHWH would be a sanctuary or a place of true protection for those who would treat him as holy and who would have a wholesome fear of or reverential regard for him. At the same time, he would prove to be a stone causing stumbling to the Israelites who failed to put their trust in him. (Isaiah 8:13, 14) Likewise, Jesus Christ, the direct representative of his Father, became a stone occasioning stumbling to those who persisted in unbelief. He is the stone his Father laid in Zion (with Zion seemingly being representative of all Israel to which the Father sent his Son), the sure foundation on which all who become part of the family of approved children are built like stones that align with it. Their faith in him is expressed through loyal adherence to his example and teaching. No one putting faith, confidence, or trust in Jesus Christ as the stone laid in Zion will be put to shame. No one will experience the panic and humiliation that comes to those who see the object of their confidence shown up as unreliable.

Notes:

According to the literal Greek reading of Romans 9:5, the phrase, “Christ according to the flesh,” is followed by the words, “the [one] being over all, God, blessed into the ages. Amen.” Therefore, a number of translators have taken this to be a reference to Christ as being God over all. “Christ who is above all, God, blessed for ever. Amen.” (NJB) “Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!

Amen.” (NIV) “They are the earthly family into which Christ was born, who is God over all. Praise him forever! Amen.” (NCV)

Nowhere in Paul’s letters, though, is Christ designated as God over all, and other translations are explicit in not linking the words to Christ. “May God, supreme above all, be blessed for ever! Amen.” (REB) “God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.” (NAB) “I pray that God, who rules over all, will be praised forever! Amen.” (CEV)

After his resurrection, Jesus Christ was granted all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18) So he could rightly be referred to as “being over all.” There is a possibility, therefore, that Romans 9:5 means that Christ is over all, with the expression of blessing applying to the Father (“Christ … who is over all. [May] God be blessed forever. Amen.”) At other times, Paul directed similar expressions to God. (Romans 1:25; 7:25; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 9:15; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:17)

In Romans 9:26, the apostle Paul made use of Hosea 1:10 (2:1) to establish that persons who were once not God’s people would become “sons of the living God.” Therefore, whether “in the place” has reference to a literal place or the phrase signifies “instead of” is immaterial, for it has no direct bearing on the apostle’s development of the subject.

A number of translations have adopted the meaning “instead of” or omitted the reference to “place.” “Instead of being told, ‘You are ‘Not-My-People,’ they shall be called Children-of-the-Living-God.” (Hosea 2:1, *Tanakh*) “They were called, ‘You are not my people,’ but later they will be called ‘children of the living God.’” (Hosea 1:10; Romans 9:26, NCV) *Und es soll geschehen, anstatt dass man zu ihnen sagt: »Ihr seid nicht mein Volk«, wird man zu ihnen sagen: »O ihr Kinder des lebendigen Gottes!«* (And it must occur, instead of one’s saying to them, “You are not my people,” one will be saying to them, “O you children of the living God!”) (Hosea 2:1, Luther, 1984 revision [German]) *Und es soll geschehen: Anstatt dass zu ihnen gesagt wurde: »Ihr seid nicht mein Volk«, sollen sie Kinder des lebendigen Gottes genannt werden.* (And it must occur: Instead of its having been said to them: “You are not my people,” they shall be called sons of the living God.) (Romans 9:26, Luther, 1984 revision [German])

If the term “place” is to be understood as designating a literal location, the meaning could be that, while the Israelites were in their land and engaged in idolatry, they ceased to be God’s people. Upon being restored to the land, a

repentant remnant of Israelites would in that very “place” be called “sons of the living God.”

In Romans 9:28, numerous manuscripts contain an expanded reading that includes words found in the Septuagint text of Isaiah 10:22, 23. “For he is finishing and shortening a word [a sentence, an accounting, or a deed] in righteousness, because a shortened word [sentence, accounting, or deed] the Lord will carry out on the earth.” This may be understood to mean that, in executing justice, the Lord would completely and in a short time or quickly carry out his word respecting the inhabitants of the land. No protracted period would be involved in performing the deed that his word of warning had expressed. The Greek term for “word” (*lógos*) has often been rendered “sentence” (NAB, NJB, NRSV, REB) and can also refer to a thing or an act.

Romans 10: 1-21

10. God’s present purpose for Israel

Verses 1-5 Israel’s present condition

Verses 6-21 Present salvation for both Jew and Gentile

Addressing believers as “brothers,” Paul continued to express his loving concern for his fellow countrymen. In his “heart” or deep inner self he wished that they would attain salvation, being reconciled to God through Christ as his beloved children, and this was expressed in his prayer for them. (10:1; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

Based on his own experience, he could testify to the reality of the zeal for God his fellow Jews had, but it was not a zeal “according to knowledge.” (10:2) Their zeal was based on seeking to gain merit through law observance. They did not “know” or recognize that an approved relationship with God could only result through faith in his Son and the provision for forgiveness of sins made possible through him.

The unbelieving Jews remained in ignorance concerning the “righteousness of God,” failing to recognize how the righteousness of which he is the source could be attained. Therefore, they endeavoured to establish their own righteousness or right standing with God on the basis of law observance and did not submit to his “righteousness” or his arrangement for humans to gain an approved relationship with him. (10:3)

Regarding the divinely appointed way to gain God's approval, Paul added, "For the end of the law [is] Christ for [resultant] righteousness to all who believe." The reference to Christ's being the "end of the law" may be variously understood, and this is reflected in the renderings of translations. (10:4)

One meaning could be that the law ends with Christ, making it obsolete. "Christ makes the Law no longer necessary for those who become acceptable to God by faith." (CEV) "Christ ended the law so that everyone who believes in him may be right with God." (NCV)

Another significance would be that the law finds its fulfilment or full meaning in Christ. "The Law has found its fulfilment in Christ so that all who have faith will be justified." (NJB) "Christ gives the full meaning to the Law." (CEV, footnote)

A third possibility is that, in Christ, the goal or purpose of the law is attained. "For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law. All who believe in him are made right with God." (NLT) *Denn mit Christus ist das Ziel erreicht, um das es im Gesetz geht: Jeder, der an ihn glaubt, wird für gerecht erklärt.* (For with Christ the goal, which the law is about, is attained: Everyone who believes on him will be declared righteous.) (German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*) *Denn mit Christus ist die Absicht des Gesetzes vollkommen erfüllt. Wer an ihn glaubt, wird vor Gott gerecht gesprochen.* (For, with Christ, the purpose of the law is completely fulfilled. Whoever believes on him will be declared righteous before God.) (German, *Neues Leben*)

Regardless of the precise significance of "end," the main thought is that faith in Christ, not law observance, is the basis for being granted a right standing before God. Flawed humans simply cannot faultlessly live up to the law and obtain divine approval on the basis of personal merit.

Concerning the righteousness attainable on the basis of the law (literally, "righteousness out of the law"), Paul quoted from Leviticus 18:5 and referred to the word as having been written by Moses, "The man who does them [the commandments] will live by them." Accordingly, faultless law observance would mean life for the individual. (10:5; see the Notes section.)

The "righteousness" or right standing with God that stems from faith is not dependent on human effort. To back up this thought, Paul personified the "righteousness from faith" and quoted it as speaking words that paraphrased Deuteronomy 30:12-14. "Do not say in your heart [your inner self], Who will ascend into heaven?" The purpose of such an ascension would have been to

bring Christ down. (10:6) It was also unnecessary to ask, “Who will descend into the abyss?” The reason for this descent would have been to raise Christ from the dead. (10:7)

In the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, there is no mention of descending into the abyss, but the reference is to crossing to the other side of the sea. Paul may have made the connection to ascending because Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the law. The apostle possibly drew on the event involving Jonah when referring to the descending into the abyss. Upon being tossed into the sea and thereafter swallowed by the large sea creature, Jonah came to be in the “abyss.” (Jonah 2:4-6) Jesus mentioned the sign of Jonah in connection with his future resurrection, and so it seems reasonable that Paul would have thought of this sign. (Matthew 12:39, 40)

Thus the apostle made it clear that there was no need for anyone to ascend heavenward to bring Christ down in order to reveal how his Father’s approval could be attained nor was it necessary to descend into the abyss, for Christ had already been raised from the dead. No extraordinary human effort was needed to obtain the right standing with God that resulted from faith.

To establish this point, Paul had the “righteousness from faith” speak with the words found in Deuteronomy 30:14, “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.’” The apostle then identified this “word” as being “the word of faith which we [he and fellow believers] proclaim.” (10:8)

It appears that the apostle’s application is based on Deuteronomy 30:6. “YHWH your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed [offspring] so that you will love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” These words parallel the prophecy about the new covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The law of the new covenant was foretold to be written on hearts, resulting in a true knowing of YHWH and an approved relationship with him because sins would be forgiven.

It was on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death that the new covenant came into being. Accordingly, the thought about a righteousness stemming from faith or trust was expressed in Deuteronomy, for the words revealed a relationship that YHWH would bring about and which would lead to genuine love for him, a love from the “heart” or inner self. He made this relationship possible through his Son, and this is the “word” or message that Paul and other believers proclaimed. They themselves had embraced it, and it was part of their inmost selves (in their hearts). This “word” was also in their mouths, for they, as God’s beloved

children whose inner selves had been transformed, proclaimed the message to others.

With specific reference to the “word of faith,” Paul continued, “If you confess Jesus Christ as Lord with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved, for with the heart one believes for righteousness, but with the mouth one confesses for salvation.” (10:9, 10)

The confession or acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord involves more than a mere expression of the lips. For believers, it means accepting him as their owner who bought them with his precious blood and living a life that harmonizes with his teaching and his example of self-sacrificing love. (Luke 6:46; John 13:13-17, 34, 35; 1 Peter 1:17-19; 2 Peter 2:1)

The resurrection of Jesus is the confirmation that he is indeed the Son of God. Therefore, faith in him of necessity also means that the believer’s heart or inner self is fully convinced that his Father resurrected him. The unconditional acceptance of Jesus as Lord and the faith rooted in the inner self that God raised him from the dead result in salvation. Believers cease to be dead in trespasses and sins and enjoy a newness of life as God’s approved children.

The faith or trust that originates from the heart or the inner self, the real person, results in righteousness or a right standing before God. With the mouth, the faith stemming from the heart is expressed and so is “for salvation” or confirms the salvation that has come into the believer’s possession. The confession or acknowledgment of the mouth reflects the faith of the inner self.

In the world of unbelievers, the believer may become an object of hostility or disdain. Faith in Jesus, however, will never lead to shattered hopes or disappointments, “for the scripture [Isaiah 28:16, LXX] says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” (10:11; see the Notes section.)

No believer is excluded from this comforting assurance, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Greek being representative of all non-Jewish peoples). Jesus is “Lord of all” and is “rich to all who call upon him.” (10:12) All who call upon him, putting their faith in him and looking to him for help and guidance, are assured of his generous response. According to John 1:14 and 16, from the fullness of his kindness, he imparted kindness upon kindness to his disciples. Jesus manifested a disposition of matchless love, and believers continue to be the objects of his loving care and compassionate concern. Their salvation is assured and to be enjoyed in the fullest sense upon coming into possession of the sinless state of God’s beloved children.

The assurance is expressed in the quotation from Joel 2:32 (3:5, LXX), “For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” (10:13; see the Notes section for additional comments.) This calling is an expression of faith and constitutes a recognition of Jesus as the Lord who has been granted all authority in heaven and on earth. The forgiveness he effected through his death for the human family made salvation possible, delivering believers from the condemnatory judgment to which sin leads. In view of what he has done for them, making the ultimate sacrifice so that they might live as his Father’s approved children, believers rightly look to Jesus for his continued aid and guidance.

To be able to call on Jesus, one would first have to believe in him. By means of questions, Paul drew attention to the aspects that needed to precede one’s coming to be in a position to be able to call upon the name of Jesus. “How, then, will they call on one whom they have not believed? But how will they believe on one of whom they have not heard? But how will they hear without [someone’s] preaching? But how will they preach if they are not sent?” (10:14, 15) Proclaimers of the message must be sent out. Their proclamation needs to be heard and believed to be acted upon with a calling upon the Son of God.

That there would be individuals sent forth to announce the message or glad tidings about Christ is implied in the quotation from Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful [are] the feet of those proclaiming glad tidings of good things!” The approaching feet of those sent to announce good news would be a welcome sight to those who would be receptive to the message. (10:15)

“But not all” would heed or respond favourably to the glad tidings, “for [as Paul continued] Isaiah [53:1, LXX] says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (10:16; see the Notes section for additional comments.) The question implied that, despite the proclamation of the message, many paid no attention to it, dismissing it as not deserving to be believed.

Accordingly, belief, faith, or trust results from responsiveness to the “report.” Paul added, “but the report through the word of Christ [God, according to other manuscripts].” (10:17; see the Notes section for additional comments.) The phrase, “through the word of Christ,” could be understood to mean that the report or message needing to be heard relates to Christ or that he is the one “through” whom it came originally.

For it to be heard, a report or message must be proclaimed. So, with reference to the Jews, Paul raised the question, “Have they not heard?” (10:18) In the Greek

text, there are two words meaning “not” and could signify “really not” or “absolutely not.”

Paul answered the question with a quotation from Psalm 19:4 (18:5, LXX), “To all the earth their sound went out, and to the boundaries of the habitable land their utterances.” (10:18)

In its original setting, the words of the psalmist applied to the impressive testimony about the glory or splendour of God that the heavenly bodies conveyed without audible speech or words, and which testimony reached all regions of the earth. The apostle could fittingly appropriate the language of the psalmist, for the glad tidings about Christ had been proclaimed throughout the Greco-Roman world. (Compare Colossians 1:5, 6, 23.) Therefore, the failure of the Jews to respond to the message could not be attributed to their not having had the opportunity to hear it.

The apostle Paul raised yet another question, “Did Israel not know?” Based on the answer he provided when quoting words he attributed to Moses, the apostle was asking about Israel’s not knowing that the good news would be proclaimed to the non-Jewish peoples. The answer is (Deuteronomy 32:21, LXX), “I [YHWH] will make you jealous [with what is] not a nation; I will provoke you with a senseless nation.” (10:19) The jealousy and provocation would come about when the Israelites saw non-Israelite people (without the standing of a nation God had constituted and without the wisdom contained in the law) in a more favorable situation than they were.

Paul referred to the words of Isaiah (65:1, LXX) as being even bolder in establishing that God would be dealing favourably with non-Israelites. “I was found among [literally, ‘in,’ but not in all manuscripts] those who did not seek me. I became manifest to those who were not inquiring for me.” (10:20; see the Notes section.) The fact that they were not seeking nor inquiring reveals that they had no relationship with YHWH. They were not his people.

As for Israel, Isaiah (65:2, LXX) continued, “[The] whole day [long] I [YHWH] have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” (10:21) Accordingly, from their own Scriptures, the Israelites knew that non-Israelites would receive God’s favourable attention while they themselves were acting contrary to his appeal to them.

Notes:

In Romans 10:1, the oldest extant manuscripts read, “Brothers, indeed the wish [more literally, ‘good pleasure’] of my heart and the supplication to God for

them [is] for salvation.” Numerous later manuscripts include the “is” that is missing in the early manuscripts. Still other manuscripts read “Israel” instead of “them.”

For Romans 10:5, the oldest extant manuscript (P46) supports the reading, “The man who has done them will live by [literally, ‘in’] them.” Other manuscripts say, “The man who has done it [them or no pronoun, according to still other manuscripts] will live by [literally, ‘in’] it.”

According to the oldest extant manuscripts, Paul did not use the Greek word *pás* (everyone) in his earlier quotation (Romans 9:33), but here, in Romans 10:11, he did. His apparent reason being that the one who believes can be anyone who believes and, therefore, “all” who believe are included in the assurance of not being put to shame.

In the Masoretic Text, Joel 2:32 (3:5) refers to calling on the name of YHWH (the one represented by the name). The apostle Paul appropriated the words (Romans 10:13), and the context indicates that his focus was on Christ. This is in harmony with what the Father decreed respecting his Son. “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” (Acts 4:12, NAB)

The quoted question in Romans 10:16 appears in a context relating to the coming Messiah. (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) Appropriately, therefore, Paul used it when commenting on the unresponsiveness of many Jews to the message about Christ.

In Paul’s quotation in Romans 10:16, the word for “report” is *akoē*. This term can relate to the faculty of hearing, the hearing itself, or the content of what is heard, the message, news, report, or rumour. The word *akoē* appears twice in Romans 10:17. This raises the question as to whether *akoē*, in verse 17, should be understood to relate to the content of the message (or to what is heard) as it is in verse 16. Maintaining consistency in the translation of the Greek would favor rendering the term as “report,” “message,” or “proclamation” in verses 16 and 17.

The Septuagint text of Isaiah 65:1 basically has the same words as Romans 10:20, but they are in reverse order. “I became manifest to those who did not seek me; I was found by those who were not inquiring for me.”

Romans 11: 1-36

11. God's future purpose for Israel

Verses 1-10 Israel's national setting aside not final

After raising the question about whether God had rejected “his people” (“his inheritance,” according to third-century P46), Paul answered it with a strong denial, “Never may it be! For I, too, am an Israelite, from the seed [or offspring] of Abraham, [and] of the tribe of Benjamin.” (11:1; see the Notes section for additional comments.) He had been shown extraordinary divine favor while a persecutor of believers, with the resurrected Son of God personally revealing himself to him. (Acts 9:1-6; 1 Timothy 1:12-16) If God had rejected Israel as a whole, Paul may have been implying that he also would not have been shown mercy. Another possibility is that the apostle was horrified about the very suggestion that God had rejected his people, for he himself was a descendant of Abraham and an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin.

God had foreknown Israel before it ever came into existence as a people, and so it was inconceivable that he would reject the very people whom he had foreknown when Abraham and Sarah were still childless. (11:2; Genesis 15:2-5)

Widespread unbelief among the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might have suggested that God had rejected his people. The situation in the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel during the time of Elijah, however, reveals that this was not the case.

With a question, Paul called attention to Elijah’s pleading with God against Israel, “Lord, your prophets they have killed, your altars they have demolished, and I only am left, and they are seeking for my soul [life].” (11:2, 3; see the Notes section regarding 11:3.) According to his estimate of the situation, Elijah considered himself to be the only one remaining of God’s people among the ten northern tribes of Israel, and his death would mean that there would be no one left.

But what was the divine response? “I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” (11:4) According to the account in 1 Kings 19 (3 Kings 19, LXX), the words about the seven thousand men followed a pronouncement of divine judgment that would be carried out through Hazael (the future king of Syria), Jehu (the future king of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel), and Elisha (the successor of Elijah as prophet). The implication is that those who had refused to engage in Baal worship would be spared. They

continued to be persons whom YHWH considered as his own people, whereas he had rejected the others as meriting his wrath. (1 Kings 19:15-18 [3 Kings 19:15-18, LXX])

“Therefore,” on the basis of past history, Paul continued, “thus also now in the present time, there has come to be a remnant according to the gracious [divine] choice [literally, according to the choice of grace (or unmerited kindness or favor)].” Those who responded in faith to the message about Christ came to be the beneficiaries of divine favor. Among the many who persisted in unbelief, believers proved to be the remnant that God, in expression of his unmerited kindness, elected or chose to be his approved children. (11:5)

With the election or choosing being on the basis of God’s gracious favor, it was not dependent on works (literally, “out of works”); otherwise favor would cease to be favor. (11:6; see the Notes section.) For the divine choosing to have been based on “works” or law observance would have meant that this choosing could have been earned or merited. It would then not have been an expression of divine favor.

Paul raised the question, “What then?” He probably meant, What should we conclude from the evidence presented? “What Israel is seeking, this it did not attain, but the chosen ones did attain [it], and the rest were hardened.” (11:7)

Earlier, Paul mentioned that Israel sought to attain righteousness or a right standing before God based on law observance or personal merit. (9:30-33) As flawed humans, they could not succeed in faultlessly living up to the requirements of the law and so did not attain the right standing before God that they were seeking. Having responded in faith to the divine provision for having their sins forgiven on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice for them, the “chosen ones,” though, did obtain righteousness or a divinely approved standing. God graciously chose them as his beloved children because they responded to his way to be in an acceptable state before him. Those who persisted in unbelief, rejecting the divine arrangement for attaining a divinely approved standing, were hardened. They continued to be unresponsive to the appeal to become reconciled to God through Christ.

To describe the hardened state, Paul used expressions from Deuteronomy 29:4, Isaiah 29:10, and Psalm 69:22, 23 (68:23, 24, LXX, which words of the psalmist he attributed to David). “God has given them a spirit of drowsiness, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear, until this very day.” (11:8) In their unresponsive state, the unbelievers proved to be in a condition comparable to deep sleep. Though they had eyes, they could not see or perceive God’s will for

them, and their ears proved to be deaf insofar as responsive listening was concerned.

“And David says, ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap and a stumbling block and a retribution for them. Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and always bend down their back.’” (11:9, 10) This quotation from Psalm 69:22, 23 (68:23, 24, LXX), although differing in word order, reflects the reading of the extant Septuagint text. The “table” would be representative of whatever they regarded as desirable for food and drink or what would be essential for their well-being. The psalmist’s appeal was that everything to which his enemies looked to benefit them would actually harm them. Similarly, in the case of those who persisted in unbelief, their pursuit of righteousness according to their own choosing actually led to their spiritual injury. They remained blind to God’s way. Instead of enjoying the freedom of God’s beloved children, they remained enslaved to sin (comparable to having their backs bowed down in servitude).

Verses 11-24 Israel’s present national rejection has a divine purpose

In the first century CE, the majority of the Jews did not respond in faith to the message about Christ. So Paul raised the question, “Did they stumble so that they might fall?” Was their stumbling in unbelief of such a nature that recovery would be impossible (as would be the case with persons who stumble, fall, and injure themselves so seriously that they are unable to get up)? The apostle answered the question emphatically, “May it never be!” He saw the “misstep” of his fellow Jews as leading to a spiritual benefit for the non-Jews. The result for believing Gentiles proved to be salvation and served to incite unbelieving Jews to jealousy. (11:11)

The “misstep” of the majority of the Jews meant that the first Jewish believers began to focus more attention on making known the message about Christ to Gentiles, with positive results in major cities of the Greco-Roman world. Non-Jews who responded in faith ceased to be dead in trespasses and sins and thus were saved or delivered from a state of condemnation. By God’s gracious favor, they came to be his free children, leading upright lives as persons no longer enslaved to sinful ways. Their manner of life gave evidence of an inner joy and a sense of well-being from being confident of God’s loving care and concern for them. (Compare Acts 8:1-8; 11:19-26; 13:44-49; 14:27; 15:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 2:1-7, 11-22.)

The tremendous change that faith in Christ had brought about in the lives of Gentile believers would not escape the attention of unbelieving Jews and, in

time, would move godly ones among them to recognize the enviable spiritual state Gentile believers enjoyed. This would serve to incite them to jealousy or to look upon the faith that had so greatly benefited non-Jewish believers as also being highly desirable for them.

The misstep of the majority of the Jews in failing to put faith in Christ resulted in “riches for the world” and their decrease “riches for the Gentiles.” The priceless treasure of coming to be God’s approved children and all the blessings associated therewith made all other riches pale in value. Since a misstep on the part of the majority of the Jews had brought such a great treasure to the world and made it possible for non-Jewish believers to be spiritually enriched beyond measure, “how much more will their fullness” mean! The inclusion of the full number of the godly Jewish remnant in the community of Jewish and non-Jewish believers would result in a great enrichment of this corporate body. (11:12)

With these expressions about his fellow Jews, Paul did not intend to minimize his mission to the Gentiles. As the apostle to the Gentiles, he addressed non-Jewish believers, telling them that he “glorified” his ministry. (11:13) Paul highly valued having been personally entrusted by Jesus Christ to serve in this capacity. (Compare Acts 22:17-21; 26:12-18; 1 Timothy 1:12-14.)

At the same time, the apostle deeply cared about fellow Jews and his desire was that, through his ministry, he might be able to incite some of them to the kind of jealousy that would move them to put faith in Jesus Christ, resulting in their salvation or their deliverance from sin and condemnation. (11:14)

On account of unbelief, Paul’s fellow Jews did not possess the approved standing before God that faith in Christ had made possible. Accordingly, their unbelief had led to divine rejection. Their rejection, though, had resulted in an extensive proclamation of Christ in the Gentile world, with many responding in faith and coming to be reconciled to God as beloved children. Thus the rejection of the Jews meant reconciliation for the Gentile world. (11:15)

Regarding future acceptance of the Jews, the apostle added that it would signify “life from the dead.” (11:15) The context does not clarify in what sense the acceptance of the Jews would mean life from the dead. Paul may have thought of their responding in faith to Jesus Christ as a resurrection from the state of being dead in sin. This would parallel Jesus’ own words, “Whoever hears my word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life, and is not condemned but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24) That the changed course resulting from repentance is comparable to a resurrection is reflected in the words Jesus

had the father of the prodigal son say, “This son of mine was dead but has come to life again.” (Luke 15:24)

Commenting on the reason for a future believing response among the Jews, Paul continued, “If, however, the firstfruits [are] holy, [so] also [is] the lump [from which the firstfruits were taken]; and if the root [is] holy, [so] also [are] the branches.” (11:16) The initial number of Jews who became believers proved to be the firstfruits. They were Israelites in the true sense of the word who were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah and so were part of the people whom God had chosen as his own.

As Paul had emphasized earlier, not all who are natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are truly “Israel.” (9:6) This suggests that the holy “lump” designates the godly members of the Jewish nation who, like Paul prior to his encounter with the risen Christ, had not accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah and the unique Son of God.

The forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob proved to be the “holy root.” The branches springing from that “holy root” would likewise be holy. These branches would be the descendants of Abraham whom he would be able to recognize as his children on the basis of their faith in God and his promises. (11:16)

Gentile believers, though, did not have any valid basis for being proud about their standing before God. On account of their unbelief, Jews who had a direct link to the holy root proved to be like branches of an olive tree that were broken off. Gentiles, on the other hand, did not spring from the same root, with their situation being comparable to that of branches from a wild olive tree which had been grafted in among the branches of the cultivated variety. (11:17)

Thus the Gentile believers came to share the “fatness” or richness of the “root” of the olive tree. (11:17; see the Notes section for additional comments.) They participated fully with Jewish believers in all the privileges and blessings associated with the root. These privileges and blessings were primarily linked to Jesus Christ and what he accomplished when laying down his life in sacrifice, for he, according to the flesh, had come from the line of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah.

Therefore, Gentile believers should not be boasting about their standing in relation to what had happened to the Jewish “branches” because of unbelief. The Gentile “branches” were not the bearers of the root, and it was not from them that all the branches received nourishment. Instead, they were dependent on the

root from which all that was essential became available through Christ. (11:18) This harmonizes with Jesus' own words to a Samaritan woman, "We [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22)

Paul's next words appear to highlight why certain ones among the Gentile believers felt justified in boasting. "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." (11:19)

While that was indeed the case, Paul pointed to the reason for this. On account of their unbelief or the failure to express faith, many Jews were like branches broken off from the olive tree. In the case of the Gentiles, they were standing by faith. The position of the Gentiles in the olive tree was solely attributable to their faith in Christ and the forgiveness of sins made possible through his sacrificial death. Accordingly, Gentile believers had no valid grounds for an exalted view of their situation. Instead, they were to have a wholesome fear of losing their place in the olive tree by succumbing to a loss of faith. (11:20)

Paul warned the non-Jewish believers about how serious this would be. "For since God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you." Unbelieving Jews were not shielded from divine judgment, and neither would Gentile believers if they succumbed to a loss of faith. (11:21)

The development involving Jewish unbelievers and non-Jewish believers revealed the "kindness and severity of God." He dealt with severity toward Jews who fell in unbelief but expressed kindness toward Gentile believers. To continue being recipients of God's kindness, they needed to maintain their faith. Through faith, they entered the realm of God's kindness and, by faith, they remained in it. Loss of faith would signify ceasing to be favored with God's kindness and being lopped off from the olive tree. (11:22) If, on the other hand, unbelieving Jews became believers, they would be grafted in, for God is the one having the power "to graft them in again." (11:23)

Addressing non-Jewish believers, Paul continued, "If you were cut from an olive tree that is wild by nature and, contrary to nature, were grafted into the cultivated olive tree, how much more so will these who are [natural branches] be grafted back into their own olive tree!" (11:24) Former unbelief would not prevent believing Jews from again coming to be branches in the olive tree to which they originally belonged.

Verses 25-26 Restoration of the nation certain

Paul wanted his non-Jewish brothers or fellow believers not to remain ignorant of a "mystery" so as to avoid considering themselves wiser than they were in

relation to the Jews because of their unbelief. Explaining this mystery, Paul added, “A hardening in part has occurred to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘Out of Zion will come a deliverer, and he will turn away impiety from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’” (11:25-27)

It appears that, as earlier in Paul’s letter (9:6), “Israel” designates all descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who have faith in God and his promises. In this Israel, a partial hardening has taken place, for not all were unresponsive to the message about Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries, Jews have become his loyal disciples. The apostle, though, appears to have looked forward to the time when the partial hardening would end. This would be after the “fullness of the Gentiles” had come in or after they had become part of the “olive tree.” Seemingly, the proclamation of the glad tidings about Christ would then no longer result in more non-Jews coming to be believers. At that time, though, all those whom God regarded as Israel would come to believe in his Son. With these new Jewish believers coming to be part of the “olive tree” having both Jewish and non-Jewish branches, all that is truly Israel would be saved. (11:25, 26)

Paul did not explain just how this would take place, but he based his comments regarding the mystery on words from Isaiah 59:20, 21, and 27:9. The promised deliverer from Zion refers to the Messiah. This suggests that Christ’s return in glory may provide the opportunity for Jewish believers in God and his promises to accept him, and he, in his capacity as deliverer, would then remove impiety from Jacob. (11:26; see the Notes section.) This impiety may be their former unbelief. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:12, 13, where Paul describes his own situation before he became a believer.)

Isaiah 59:21 refers to God’s covenant with Israel, and Isaiah 27:9 (LXX) includes the words, “when I take away his sin.” It may be that Paul (11:27) also had in mind the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) when he chose to express the thought of the Scriptures with words from Isaiah 59:21 and 27:9.

With reference to the then-existing situation among the majority of the Jews, the apostle noted that, respecting the glad tidings, they were enemies for the sake of the non-Jews. This is because their unresponsiveness opened the door to faith in Jesus for the Gentiles to an extent that otherwise would not have been possible. On the basis of divine election or choosing, the Jews were beloved on account of their forefathers. (11:28) This did not change because so many of them persisted

in unbelief, for God has no regrets in connection with his gracious gifts and calling. (11:29)

Paul reminded his non-Jewish brothers that they, too, had formerly been disobedient to God but had been shown mercy because of the disobedience of the Jews. (11:30) The unresponsiveness of the Jews had worked out as a blessing for the Gentiles. They became recipients of divine mercy upon embracing in faith the good news about Christ that was proclaimed to them.

Regarding his unbelieving Jewish brothers, Paul said, “Thus also they now have disobeyed with [resultant] mercy to you, that also they now [omitted in numerous manuscripts] may be shown mercy.” (11:31; see the Notes section.) Initial unbelief would not prevent Jews from becoming believers and being shown mercy as forgiven children of God.

Both Jews and non-Jews can have divine mercy extended to them. “For God has confined all in disobedience, that he might be merciful to all.” (11:32) He allowed both Jews and non-Jews to choose their own paths and to disregard his ways. Thus as disobedient persons, possessing no merit on their own, he can show them his mercy when they repent of their ways and put faith in his Son and the deliverance from sin he effected through his sacrificial death.

God’s gracious dealings with Jews and non-Jews prompted Paul to express praise, “O the depth of riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable [are] his judgments and unfathomable his ways!” (11:33)

The riches in the form of mercy and gracious favor extended to sinful humans are incomprehensible. The wisdom and knowledge reflected in the outworking of his loving purpose for the human family are of incomparable greatness. His judgments give evidence of the kind of impartial justice that defies analysis. The ways in which he handles matters are humanly incomprehensible.

Paul backed up his expressions with words from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 (or 41:2[3]). “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counsellor? Or who has first given to him and will have it recompensed to him [the giver]?” (11:34, 35; see the Notes section.)

No human has the capacity to grasp God’s mind. No one is in a position to give him any counsel or advice. As the Creator and Owner of everything, there is no gift that any human could present to him and, on that basis, be entitled to a repayment.

Everything exists “from him,” for he is the ultimate source. “Through him,” all things are sustained. They exist “for him,” serving his purpose. (11:36)

Rightly he deserves having “glory” or the greatest praise ascribed to him. That is how Paul felt, saying, “To him [be] the glory forever [literally, into the ages]. Amen [So be it].” (11:36)

Notes:

Paul’s question (11:1) and his comment that God did not reject his people (11:2) reflect the language of Psalm 94:14 (93:14, LXX). The Septuagint reads, “Because the Lord will not reject his people, and he will not leave his inheritance.” This inclusion of “inheritance” may explain why the word replaces “people” in third-century P46 in Romans 11:1. The reading “people,” however, has the stronger manuscript support and is more likely to be original.

Romans 11:3 is not an exact quotation of 1 Kings 19:10, 14 (3 Kings 19:10, 14, LXX), but accurately conveys the thoughts Elijah expressed.

In Romans 11:6, many later manuscripts add, “But if it is from [literally, out of] works, it is no longer favour; otherwise work is no longer work.”

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) does not include the word “root” in Romans 11:17. It reads, “sharers of the fatness of the olive tree.”

In Romans 11:26, the quoted words are nearly identical to the reading of Isaiah 59:20 in the extant Septuagint text.

According to the literal Greek, Romans 11:31 reads, “Thus also these now have disobeyed to your mercy, that also they now might be shown mercy.” The preceding verse attributes the opportunity for mercy extended to the Gentiles to the disobedience of the Jews. So it would appear preferable to regard “to your mercy” as meaning to the resultant mercy shown to the Gentiles. Accordingly, just as mercy was extended to the disobedient Gentiles, mercy would be shown to the disobedient Jews. “So now they also have been disobedient at a time when you are receiving mercy; so that to them too there may now be mercy.” (Weymouth)

Some have interpreted this to mean that, through the mercy of believing Gentiles expressed by their sharing the glad tidings about Christ, Jews would be assisted to become believers. This appears to be less likely, as such a development would not particularly be associated with the time the “fullness” of the Gentiles would be brought in.

The wording of Romans 11:34 is closer to that of the Septuagint in Isaiah 40:13 than to the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. The Septuagint reads, “Who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has become his counselor? Who will instruct him?” The Masoretic Text says, “Who has assessed the spirit of YHWH, and who as his counselor has instructed him?” Numerous translators have understood the expression for “assessed” to mean “directed,” but the basic meaning of the word is “measure,” “calculate,” “estimate,” or “take the proportion of.” The pronoun “him,” with which the question ends, refers to YHWH. In the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, however, the pronoun is feminine and applies to the “spirit.”

Translators have often departed from the reading of the Masoretic Text for Job 41:2, 3, or 11 (depending on how the verses are numbered). The literal reading of the Masoretic Text is closer to the wording of Romans 11:35 than is the extant text of the Septuagint. A literal reading of the Masoretic Text is, “Who has anticipated me that I should repay him?” The term here rendered “anticipated” has, on the basis of Romans 11:35, been regarded as meaning to be first with the giving of a gift, but the word can also denote “confronted.” The meaning “confronted” may explain why the Septuagint says “resisted” and thereafter differs from the reading of the Masoretic Text, “Who has resisted me and endured?”

Romans 12: 1-21

12 Practical Christian service

The last five chapters constitute the practical part of the epistle. Now the doctrine of salvation is to be worked out in experience. Service is to be expressed in the outliving of the inliving Christ.

Verses 1-2 Christian service and self

On the basis of the “compassion [plural in Greek] of God,” Paul exhorted his “brothers” or fellow believers about how they should be using their bodies. In response to the mercy they had been shown in being forgiven of their sins and adopted as God’s approved children, they should be motivated to present their bodies as living, holy, and well-pleasing sacrifices to him. (12:1)

Unlike animal sacrifices that required the death of the sacrificial victims, the bodies of believers are living sacrifices, with their whole life being devoted to the service of their heavenly Father. In all matters, whether in disposition, word, or deed, they should seek to bring praise to him. In presenting their bodies as

“holy” sacrifices, Christ’s disciples would seek to avoid anything that could defile the purity of their outer or inner life. With their bodies employed fully in reflecting the identity of God’s children, believers would be presenting their bodies in a way that was pleasing or acceptable to him. Indicating that the proper use of the body involves mental assent, Paul added the words, “your reasonable service.” (12:1)

The rightly motivated response to divine compassion would call for a drastic change from a believer’s former life. Paul urged fellow believers not to be conformed to the then-existing age, not taking on the outward appearance of persons who had no relationship to God. Instead, they should seek a complete transformation that involved their whole being. This would be a “renewal” of the mind, a total change in outlook from that of persons whose lives centered on the mundane. With a mind made new, believers would be able to discern the will of God, rightly evaluating what was good, pleasing, and without defect in his sight. (12:2)

Verses 3-8 Christian service and gifts

Although not specifically mentioned in the immediate context, the mind is renewed through the operation of God’s spirit on the believer. (Compare Romans 8:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 8; Titus 3:5.) The renewed spirit-directed mind has a different view of self than does the unrenewed mind. Paul, on the basis of the gracious divine favor he had been granted, admonished fellow believers not to think more of themselves than was appropriate but to think with a sound, sensible or reasonable mind. Right thinking involved recognizing or valuing the measure of faith that God had apportioned to each believer. (12:3)

The apostle could speak of the favor he had been granted. Though formerly a persecutor, a blasphemer, and an arrogant man while blind in unbelief, he had been forgiven and entrusted with an apostleship to the Gentiles. So he could admonish on the basis of who he had become (an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ) through gracious divine favor. (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; Timothy 1:13)

“The measure of faith” (as verse 6 indicates) relates to the faith expressed in the use of the divinely granted spiritual gifts within the community of believers. These gifts differ. With their varied use being intimately associated with it, faith can be understood as having been divinely apportioned to the individual believer according to measure. (12:3)

The human body is a united whole made up of many members or parts. Each part has its own function. “So,” Paul continued, “we, [though] many, [are] one

body in Christ” and, individually, fellow members of this body (literally, “each one members of one another”). Just as the human body parts do not all have the same function but are essential for the body as a whole, so also, in the body of the Christ, the individual members have different gifts to be used for the benefit of the entire community of believers. (12:4, 5)

These “gifts” were in possession of Christ’s disciples on account of gracious divine favor. Commenting on the use of these gifts, Paul continued, “Whether prophecy, in proportion to faith; whether service, in service; whether the teacher, in teaching; whether the admonisher, in admonishing; whether [not included in all manuscripts] the distributor, in sincerity; the presider, in eagerness, the merciful one, in cheerfulness.” (12:6-8)

In the first-century community of believers, prophets did at times foretell future events pertinent to fellow believers. Primarily, though, they made known God’s will and edified, encouraged, consoled, and strengthened fellow disciples of Christ. (Acts 11:27-29; 15:32; 21:10, 11; 1 Corinthians 14:3) Prophets were men of remarkable faith (Acts 11:22-24; 13:1), and so their ministering to fellow believers should have been reflective of their strong personal faith, trust, or confidence in God, his Son, and the revealed divine will. (12:6)

Service principally relates to looking after the material needs of fellow disciples of Christ. (12:7) Those serving would see to it that poor widows in their midst were provided with food and other essentials, and they would make arrangements to aid fellow believers who were impoverished on account of natural disasters or persecution. (Acts 6:1-6; 11:28-30; 24:17; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9:1-5; Galatians 2:10; Hebrews 10:32-34) In performing their service, those ministering were to do so as humble servants, faithfully discharging their trust in an exemplary manner. (Acts 6:3-6, 8; 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12, 13)

Teachers among believers were to convey the message found in the holy writings and to impart knowledge in harmony with Jesus’ example and teaching. (12:7; 1 Timothy 4:6; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:1, 2, 14-16; 3:14-17; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 6, 7) Regarding the manner in which Paul had discharged his teaching responsibility, he reminded the elders of the congregation in Ephesus, “I am clean from the blood of all, for I did not shrink back from declaring the whole will [purpose or counsel] of God to you.” (Acts 20:26, 27) He and other teachers also exposed erroneous teaching that would have been destructive to the faith of fellow believers.

The Greek word for “admonish” (*parakaléō*) literally means to “call beside” or to “call to one’s side.” As a gift for the benefit of fellow disciples of Christ,

parakaléo can refer to encouraging, comforting, exhorting, urging, imploring, or entreating. (12:8) Whereas teaching is the primary way for imparting knowledge, exhortation is more focused on motivating, encouraging, comforting, or inciting to action.

The context does not identify the nature of the distributing, giving, imparting, or sharing. (12:8) In other passages, the Greek word *metadídomi* relates to imparting a spiritual gift or the good news or sharing essentials with the needy. (Job 31:17, LXX; Proverbs 11:26, LXX; Luke 3:11; Romans 1:11; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 2:8) Regardless of what may be distributed, imparted, or given, this should be done with the right motive. It should be an expression of sincere love. The Greek term for “sincerity” (*haplótes*) applies to that which is “single,” simple, uncomplicated, or pure. The term has been rendered “liberality” or “generosity,” but this is not a significance inherent in the Greek word.

Presiding or functioning as a leader (literally, “standing before”) pertains mainly to caring for, showing concern for, or rendering aid to others. In the use of this gift, those who preside should be quick to respond to the needs of fellow believers. The Greek term for “eagerness” (*spoudé*) basically denotes “haste” or “speediness” and, in this context, can describe one who would be eager, earnest, diligent, or willing conscientiously to look after the welfare of fellow disciples of Christ. (12:8)

Verses 9-16 Christian service and fellow believers

Help or service that is an expression of mercy or compassion should be rendered cheerfully. When those who give of themselves do so, not out of a sense of duty, but gladly and wholeheartedly, this has an upbuilding effect on the recipients. They are made to feel like valued members of the community of believers. (12:8)

The apostle’s emphasis on the importance of all gifts and their right use parallels the admonition of 1 Peter 4:10 (REB): “As good stewards of the varied gifts given you by God, let each use the gift he has received in service to others.” In addition to using their gifts for the benefit of others, believers also need to conduct themselves as God’s beloved and obedient children in their daily life. This is the focus of Paul’s exhortation in the verses that follow.

Believers are to manifest unhypocritical love. In ancient Greek writings, the term *hypokrités* (hypocrite) is commonly used to designate a stage actor. Accordingly, hypocrites would be persons who play a part, make an outward

show, pretend, or dissemble, hiding their real motives as with a mask (like ancient actors wore during their performances). Love that is unhypocritical would be genuine, an expression of deep concern and care that is actively responsive to the needs of others. (12:9) This love is not a mere utterance of the lips. Those rendering kindly deeds would do so with a pure motive, not boasting nor seeking to gain praise from observers. (1 Corinthians 13:3; 1 John 3:18)

Believers should abhor what is wicked, loathing everything that is out of harmony with or in opposition to God's ways. Instead, they should cling to what is good, being attached as with glue to everything that is divinely approved. Their devotion to what is good would be evident from their noble and pure conduct. (12:9)

Christ's disciples are members of a family of "brothers," with all enjoying an equal standing as approved "sons of God." It is obligatory, therefore, that they display the brotherly affection for one another that would be characteristic of the love existing in an exemplary family. (12:10)

As members of the family of God's children, believers are encouraged to take the initiative in showing honor to others, taking the lead in actions that would demonstrate that they highly valued them. (12:10) This would include being willing to perform lowly service for fellow believers in response to needs. (Luke 22:26; John 13:12-17) Honor would also be shown when not insisting on personal rights but refraining from doing things that could be hurtful to disciples of Christ with conscientious scruples. (1 Corinthians 10:23-33)

With reference to being quick to act for the good of others or diligent in performing essential work, believers should not be idle, lazy, or indolent. (12:11; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

Disciples of Christ are urged to be "on fire," "boiling," or "glowing" in relation to the spirit. This could mean that their own spirit or inner inclination should be eager or strongly impelled to please the heavenly Father. Another possible significance is that believers should be aglow with God's spirit, earnestly striving to be guided thereby. (12:11)

Their Master or Owner is Christ, who bought them with his precious blood. So, in all that they do, believers are to serve him. (12:11) Their hope of being united with Christ and coming to enjoy the sinless state as his Father's beloved children provides them good reason for rejoicing. Before that hope is fulfilled, believers experience tribulation, suffering, or distress in a world at enmity with God. That is why Paul included the exhortation for them to be "patient in distress,"

faithfully enduring their trials without giving up or resorting to means for relief that would be divinely disapproved. They should continue to look to the heavenly Father for help and guidance, persevering in prayer. (12:12)

Many believers became impoverished on account of persecution or other adversities. This provided fellow disciples of Christ with opportunities to heed Paul's counsel to contribute to the needs of these afflicted holy ones. Their "holy" or pure standing before God was based on their faith in him and his Son. Especially when persecution resulted in scattering believers, there was a need for fellow believers who did not know them to extend hospitality, providing food and shelter for them. The Greek term for "hospitality" (*philoxenia*) literally means "love of strangers." (12:13)

In their disposition toward their persecutors, Christ's disciples were encouraged to "bless" them, not seeking to injure them but continuing to treat them with consideration and kindness. The blessing would be particularly linked to the hope that their persecutors would change and become recipients of God's blessing. Instead of cursing their persecutors, wishing them harm, believers would continue to bless them in the sense of desiring the change that would result in the greatest good coming to them. (12:14)

Devoted disciples of God's Son were to reflect fellow feeling for others, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. (12:15) To rejoice with others would mean fully to enter their joy as if it were one's own. The successes or good things others may experience would not give rise to envy but would result in shared happiness. Weeping with persons who weep would signify becoming a sympathetic sharer in their sorrow, doing whatever one can to provide comfort and to contribute to the mitigation of their sadness.

Regarding their relationship to one another, Paul admonished believers to think "the same to one another," and not to think loftily (literally, "not to be thinking the high things") but to associate with the lowly. The thought appears to be that believers should treat everyone in a considerate and loving manner and thus preserve peace and harmony among themselves. For one to look down on those from humble circumstances would be contrary to the example Jesus set, for he responded with love and compassion to the lowly and downtrodden. As part of the family of God's beloved children, the lowly deserve to be treated impartially and given loving attention. (12:16)

Verses 17-21 Christian service and unbelievers

Translators have variously paraphrased Paul's words. "Live in harmony with one another. Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people." (J. B. Phillips) "Live in peace with each other. Do not be proud, but make friends with those who seem unimportant." (NCV) "Give the same consideration to all others alike. Pay no regard to social standing, but meet humble people on their own terms." (NJB) There is a possibility that "lowly ones" refers to "lowly things," for the Greek word here (*tapeinoís*) is both a masculine and a neuter form of the plural pronominal adjective. When the reference is understood to be to "lowly things," the admonition would be for one not to have an exalted view of oneself, looking at serving others in some menial way as beneath one's dignity. "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but give yourselves to humble tasks." (NRSV, footnote) "Have full sympathy with one another. Do not give your mind to high things, but let humble ways content you." (Weymouth)

The apostle added, "Do not become wise to yourselves." Believers were not to regard themselves as wise in their own estimation, attaching undue weight to their opinions and looking down on those who did not measure up to their standards. (12:16)

When others do them harm, Christ's disciples are not to be vengeful, seeking to retaliate. They are not to repay the one who injured them with evil. (12:17)

Believers should take into consideration what others think, making sure that "in the sight of all men" or all persons their actions are good, commendable, or noble. (12:17) A literal reading of the Greek text is elliptical ("thinking beforehand good [things] before all men"), and this has given rise to a variety of renderings. "Try to do what everyone thinks is right." (NCV) "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." (NRSV) "Let your aims be such as all count honourable." (REB) "Try to earn the respect of others." (CEV) "Bear in mind the ideals that all regard with respect." (NJB) "Don't say, 'It doesn't matter what people think,' but see that your public behavior is above criticism." (J. B. Phillips) "Take thought for what is right and seemly in every one's esteem." (Weymouth)

The Greek text is an echo of the Septuagint reading of Proverbs 3:4, "Think beforehand [on] good [things] before the Lord and men." In this case (as also in Romans 12:17), the Greek word for "think beforehand" (*pronoéo*) could mean "provide." So Paul's admonition could mean that, instead of repaying evil, the believer should be providing or doing things that are good in the estimation of

all. *Bemüht euch darum, allen Menschen Gutes zu tun.* (Strive to do good to all people.) (*Neue Genfer Übersetzung* [German], footnote; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

As far as depends on Christ's disciples, they should aim to be at peace with all persons. In word and action, they should not be responsible for discord, conflict, wrangling, or heated arguments. (12:18)

Addressing fellow believers as "beloved," Paul exhorted them not to avenge themselves, retaliating when reviled or subjected to unjust treatment. Instead of taking matters into their own hands, they were to look to the heavenly Father, giving "place to [his] wrath." This would be in keeping with his assurance (Deuteronomy 32:35), "Vengeance [is] mine; I will repay." (12:19)

Focusing on the right action toward those who act hatefully, Paul quoted from Proverbs 25:21, 22, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing this, you will heap fiery coals on his head." A kindly response to an enemy's need may have an impact on him comparable to the adding of fiery coals on top of ore that is being refined. He may come to be ashamed about his hateful treatment. Instead of continuing to be hostile, his good qualities may come to the fore, leading to repentance and a changed disposition. (12:20)

When doing good to those who may have treated them hatefully or unfairly, believers gain a moral victory, one that can result in spiritual blessings to observers and former opposers. Wisely, they heed the apostle's admonition, "Do not be defeated by the bad, but defeat the bad with the good." (12:21) For one to retaliate would signify that bad has made its conquest. But when the individual does good in response to bad, his good action triumphs over evil.

Notes:

In Romans 12:11, the opening phrase literally reads, "To haste [*spoudé*, diligence, zeal, earnestness, eagerness, or speediness], not indolent." Depending on which meaning for *spoudé* has been adopted translators have variously rendered the introductory phrase of verse 11. "Do not lag in zeal." (NRSV) "Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work." (J. B. Phillips) "Do not be lazy but work hard." (NCV) *Seid nicht träge in dem, was ihr tun sollt.* (Do not be indolent in that which you should do.) (Luther, 1984 revision [German]) "Do not be indolent when zeal is required." (Weymouth)

Instead of the dative form of “Lord” (*kyrío*) in Romans 12:11, a number of manuscripts have the dative form of “time” (*kairó*). For one to “serve” the appropriate “time,” however, is not a thought that finds any parallel in the rest of the Scriptures and appears to be an error.

For Romans 12:17, certain manuscripts have an expanded reading that may have been drawn from Proverbs 3:4 and 2 Corinthians 8:21. The expanded wording for the phrase “before all men” is either “before God and all men” or “not only before God but also before all men.”

Romans 13: 1-14

13 Christian service and government

Verses 1-7 The Christian and the state

Every “soul” or person should respectfully submit to the higher or governing authorities. This is because there is “no authority except by God,” the existing authorities having been placed by him. (13:1; see the Notes section.) Although the various ruling positions are human creations, they exist by God’s permission, providing essential services that benefit communities as a whole and maintaining law and order. God has “placed” these ruling authorities in the sense that he has granted humans the freedom to devise means of governing sizable populations to prevent destructive anarchy, which would be contrary to his purpose for the continuance of a measure of stability in human society. (13:1; compare 1 Peter 2:13, 14.)

Under the present circumstances, governments, despite their varied flaws, are needed for societies to function properly, and God has not instituted any other arrangement. Therefore, for believers to rise up in revolt against existing authorities would mean taking a stand against an arrangement God has seen fit to exist. Persons who would oppose the ruling powers would bring adverse judgment or punishment upon themselves. (13:2)

Governmental authorities have the power to enforce laws and regulations. So, as Paul noted, rulers are an object of fear, as they are in a position to inflict punishment. The authority to punish is not employed against those who conduct themselves according to what rulers consider to be good. For persons who engage in practices that have been decreed as bad, however, individuals in positions of authority are an object of fear. Lawless ones know that, if they are caught, they will be punished. (13:3)

Paul raised the rhetorical question, “Do you wish to have no fear of the authority?” The implied answer is that this would not be the desirable course. Far better it would be for one to respect the power of those who exercise authority and to do good, resulting in “praise” or commendation for exemplary conduct from rulers or officials. (13:3)

Believers benefit from the existing governmental arrangements that operate by divine permission. Accordingly, the ruling authority, as Paul expressed it, is a “servant of God” for the “good” of disciples of Christ. If believers were to practice what is bad, they would have reason to be in fear of punishment. The ruling authority “bears the sword,” representative of the power to impose penalties, including capital punishment. Many of the existing laws that serve to maintain stable societies are in harmony with God’s ways. Therefore, when bringing lawbreakers to justice, the ruling authority, through its officials, functions as God’s servant in directing wrathful punishment against them. (13:4)

For believers, the necessity of being submissive to governmental authority is not just a matter of “fear,” wanting to avoid punishment. In view of their relationship to God and his purpose to let governing authorities function to preserve law and order, they should also be submissive on account of “conscience,” their internal sense that this is the right thing to do as his obedient children. (13:5)

In order to carry out their essential functions, governmental authorities need funds. For this reason, believers are to be conscientious in paying tax or tribute (*phóros*), doing so with a noble spiritual reason in mind. They recognize that the ruling authorities are rendering a service that harmonizes with God’s will and, in that sense, they are his servants. (13:6)

In their relationship to rulers and governmental officials, Christ’s disciples should pay them their due. “Tribute” (*phóros*), “tax” (*télos*) or any other kind of required fee or toll should be paid. Proper fear or respect should be shown to rulers and officials, and they should be honoured in keeping with the dignity of their respective positions. (13:7; see the Notes section.)

Verses 8 -14 The Christian and good citizenship

When it comes to rendering rightful dues to others, disciples of God’s Son should not be owing anyone anything besides loving one another, “for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” (13:8) Love is the foundation of the law God gave to the Israelites, for the commands relating to relationships with fellow humans promote just, caring, and compassionate treatment. Persons who are motivated to act out of love seek the welfare of fellow humans. The commands not to commit adultery, murder or theft, and not to covet, and any

other commandment of like nature is summed up in the one command (quoted from Leviticus 19:18, LXX), “You must love your neighbour as yourself.” (13:9; see the Notes section.)

Heeding the command to love one’s fellows means seeking their welfare and not doing them injury. Love anticipates avoiding the kind of harm to others that laws are designed to prevent through enforceable punishment. As the apostle Paul added, “Love does not work evil to [one’s] neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law.” By not harming fellow humans but being genuinely concerned about their welfare, persons who are governed by love fulfill the very purpose for which laws governing communities or societies are enacted. (13:10)

In the case of believers, love should be motivating them in all their conduct. Paul next stressed the reason for this. The coming of Christ and the laying down of his life in sacrifice proved to be the development that was to usher in a new day. So believers did “know the time.” It was an “hour” for them to be awake from sleep and not to be in a state of spiritual slumber associated with a life lacking in love. Their salvation or complete deliverance from sin and the attainment of the eternal life in the sinless state was nearer than when they first became believers. (13:11; see the Notes section.)

The night where loveless deeds are committed under the cover of darkness and where hatred and ignorance prevail was coming to an end, and the day the Son of God had made possible through his sacrificial death was drawing near. That day would be one where the hateful words, attitudes, and actions associated with darkness would cease, with love being the motivating power. Therefore, Paul urged fellow believers to rid themselves of the “works of darkness” and to equip themselves with the “weapons of light.” (13:12) Armed with weaponry that protects and defends what is right and pure, believers would be in a position to resist involvement in the “works of darkness,” the hateful attitudes, words, and actions that existed in the world of mankind alienated from God.

Disciples of God’s Son should be conducting themselves as is appropriate for the day, having nothing to hide under the cover of darkness. The orgies, excessive drinking, sexual immorality, unrestrained debauchery, strife or rivalry, and jealousy that were common in the Greco-Roman world needed to be completely banished from the life of believers. (13:13)

Instead, they were to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. So fully was their way of life to be reflective of the Son of God who set the example in the display of matchless love that it would be as if he was their identifying attire. This would put believers in a position to act on Paul’s further exhortation, “Do not make prior provision for the desires of the flesh.” As imitators of God’s Son,

his disciples would not yield to the improper cravings of their sinful flesh and plan for ways to satisfy those base desires. (13:14)

Notes:

The Book of Wisdom (thought to have been written in the first century BCE; preserved in fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) contains a passage that somewhat parallels Romans 13:1. Addressing kings and judges, Wisdom 6:3 (NRSV) says, “For your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High.”

In Romans 13:6, 7, the terms that designate types of “tax” were common in the Greco-Roman world, but their precise meaning is not known today. It appears that *phóros* applied to the tribute tax that the people of various nations under the dominion of Rome were required to pay as subjects of the Roman Empire. It may have been levied on houses, land, and persons. The term *télos* may have been applied to customs duties, tolls, and other direct or indirect taxes.

Numerous manuscripts, including fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, add the command about not bearing false witness. (Romans 13:9) The quoted words in verse 9 are the same as in the extant Septuagint text of Deuteronomy 5:17-21. The order of the commands is different in the Septuagint reading of Exodus 20:13-17.

In Romans 13:11, manuscripts vary in reading either “you” or “we” in relation to being awake from sleep.

Romans 14: 1-23

14: 1 – 15:3 Christian service and questionable things

14: 1-13 The principle of personal liberty

Paul urged fellow believers to be accepting of or welcoming to those in their midst who were not sufficiently grounded in the faith to have a sure conscience in relation to aspects associated with former beliefs and practices. In this context, faith does not pertain to belief in God and Christ, but the individual’s life of faith that is no longer subject to specific requirements regarding food and the observance of specific days as holy. On account of their past beliefs and practices, believers with a weak conscience had scruples and felt inwardly impelled to abstain from certain food (for example, meat that may have been offered to an idol prior to its having been sold) or to observe specific days. When being accepting, disciples of God’s Son were to avoid passing judgments regarding the reasoning or opinion of others about such matters. (14:1)

In the community of believers, one person might have the faith or confidence that everything was acceptable for food. Someone else, though, might be “weak,” unable to believe that everything could be eaten. Having scruples about eating meat, the individual would only eat vegetables. (14:2)

To be accepting of one another, believers needed to guard against being judgmental in matters that were unrelated to faith in God and Christ. Those who chose to eat a certain food were not to be contemptuous of those who did not. They were not to look down upon others as unduly scrupulous. Disciples of Jesus Christ who refrained from eating needed to avoid judging those who did eat as having made themselves guilty of sin. God has accepted both the one eating and the one who refrains from eating, and so believers should have the same welcoming spirit toward one another. (14:3)

All believers are servants of God and Christ. Therefore, regarding their relationship to one another, Paul raised the question, “Who are you to judge someone else’s domestic servant?” Such judging is the exclusive prerogative of the master. The apostle continued, “Before his own master [or lord] he stands [as approved] or falls [as disapproved].” With apparent reference to the believer, the apostle spoke with assurance, “But he will stand [or be upheld so as to remain in an approved condition], for the Lord [God, in other manuscripts] can make him stand.” Both the Father and the Son can provide the help that is needed for believers to remain in an acceptable condition. (14:4)

When it came to the observance of days, some believers regarded certain days as special. Others viewed all days in the same way. Instead of making an issue about this difference, believers should allow all to be persuaded in their own mind. (14:5)

As disciples of Christ, those who observe a specific day do so to him as their Lord. Later manuscripts include the parallel thought that the one who does not observe the day is refraining from such observance for him. Those who eat, eat to the Lord, for they give thanks to God. Their prayer of thanksgiving directed to the Father for the provision of food is made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so the subsequent eating is done in recognition of Jesus as Lord. Likewise, the one who does not eat a particular food is abstaining for the Lord and gives thanks to God. (14:6)

As far as believers are concerned, they do not live for themselves or die for themselves. This is because they recognize Jesus as their Lord who bought them with his precious blood. (14:7)

Therefore, as Paul continued, “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. If, then, we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” (14:8) There is

never a time when the believer does not belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. By his own sacrificial death, he purchased all, both living and dead. Now that he lives, Jesus Christ is the Lord of all whom he has purchased. So, as Paul expressed it, “For this purpose Christ died and lived [again (‘rose up,’ according to later manuscripts)], that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” (14:9)

Believers are accountable to Jesus Christ as their Lord, and his judgment perfectly reflects that of his Father. By means of his question regarding judging, Paul made it clear that a disciple of Jesus Christ is not the one who has the right to judge his brother in the matters under consideration nor is he entitled to despise or look down upon his brother. Ultimately, all must stand before God’s judgment seat (Christ’s judgment seat, according to later manuscripts). (14:10)

Paul used words in Isaiah (49:18 and 45:23, LXX) to provide evidence from the holy writings regarding accountability to the heavenly Father. “[As] I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will make acknowledgment to God.” The expression, “I live,” is a solemn declaration indicating the certainty of all bowing before the Most High in submission and making acknowledgment of him, which would include his role as judge. (14:11) Applying the quoted words, Paul continued, “So, then, each of us shall give an account of himself to God.” (14:12; the Greek words for “then” and “God” are omitted in numerous manuscripts.) The recognition that all will have to render an account to God should serve to restrain one from judging or condemning others regarding foods and the observance of special days.

14: 13b – 21 The principle of our neighbour’s welfare

Instead of judging his “brother,” a believer should be very concerned about not putting a stumbling block or an obstacle before him. Great care needs to be exercised not to do anything that could wound the conscience of a brother, causing him to stray from the right course. (14:13)

As a believer who was “in” or at one with Christ, Paul knew and was convinced that “nothing” (with apparent reference to food) is “unclean in itself.” The item would only be unclean to the person who considered it to be such. (14:14) According to Jesus’ teaching, defilement does not result from what enters the mouth but from what proceeds from the inmost self of the individual. (Mark 7:15, 18-23) Based on what Jesus taught, Paul knew for a certainty that uncleanness did not result from eating a particular food but from yielding to wrong desires. The manner in which individuals came to view certain food, however, would determine whether it could be eaten or should be rejected as unclean.

In the community of believers, not all thought alike regarding matters of this nature, for the former background of the individual disciples and their personal growth varied and had a marked effect on their consciences. This required showing consideration for others and not insisting on doing what one might have the right to do when the specific action could be very troubling to a fellow believer. For a disciple of Christ to grieve or trouble a brother on account of the food he ate would mean that he was not “walking” or conducting himself in a manner consistent with love. Therefore, Paul added, “Do not by what you eat ruin the one for whom Christ died.” (14:15) The brother is precious to the Son of God. The fellow believer belongs to Christ as one for whom he surrendered his life. So this fellow believer should rightly be shown loving consideration.

In certain cases, what is good or bad is a matter of personal perception. In itself, there may be nothing wrong in partaking of a certain food, but others may regard doing so as sinful. Whenever the potential exists that something that is good or in itself acceptable could be condemned, Paul gave the exhortation, “Do not [therefore (not in all manuscripts)] let your good be blasphemed.” (14:16) Believers should refrain from engaging in any unnecessary activity that would give occasion for others to speak abusively of them.

The “kingdom of God” (the realm where God is recognized as Sovereign) does not have its focus on matters related to eating and drinking. Coming under God’s rulership involves “righteousness” or upright living, “peace” or the promotion and preservation of good relationships, and “joy in holy spirit.” The phrase “in holy spirit” may be understood to mean that the joy, or the inward sense of happiness as a beloved child of God, comes from having his holy spirit. Another possibility is that the holy spirit is the source of the righteousness, peace, and joy existing among those who are submissive to God’s rule in their lives. (14:17)

Believers who pursue the righteousness, peace, and joy that are the focus of the “kingdom of God” or his rule are slaving for Christ. As a result, they are pleasing to God and have the approval or respect of men or people generally. (14:18)

Depending on which manuscript reading is being followed, the reference is either to what disciples of God’s Son are doing (“we are pursuing the things of peace and the things [that are] upbuilding to one another”) or should be doing (“let us pursue the things of peace and the things [that are] upbuilding to one another”). To be pleasing to God and to enjoy the respect of fellow humans, believers should be found acting in a manner that contributes to and preserves peace and does not give rise to conflict, quarreling, or heated arguments. Their showing consideration for others out of love for them would have an upbuilding

or encouraging effect. Believers would not be tearing others down, not giving rise to grievances by insisting on rights without giving any thought to how others might be affected. (14:19)

The “work of God” is what he is doing by means of his spirit, promoting the spiritual growth of believers. Therefore, any disregard for the conscientious feelings of fellow believers and becoming responsible for causing grief would be contrary to the divine working. To thus harm a brother would mean to tear down the very work that God is carrying out by means of his spirit. Accordingly, Paul urged, “Do not tear down the work of God on account of what is eaten.” While everything may be “clean” or acceptable for food, it would be wrong for a believer to eat something and thereby to cause a fellow believer to experience a spiritual fall. This falling could be through the individual’s being emboldened to act in a manner contrary to his own conscience or to being so grieved as to cease yielding to the guidance of God’s spirit. (14:20)

Disciples of Jesus Christ should make every effort to avoid stumbling anyone and thus prevent spiritual harm. “It is good not to eat meat nor to drink wine nor [to do] anything over which your brother trips.” (14:21) After the Greek word rendered “trips,” numerous later manuscripts add, “is made to stumble, or is weak.” Whenever allowances can be made for the conscientious feelings of others in any matter, believers would do so in expression of their love.

14: 22-23 The principle of God’s glory

In their life of faith, disciples of God’s Son are in various stages of spiritual progress. Of necessity, therefore, the faith or conviction they may have respecting certain matters (like those Paul mentioned) would differ. These matters should not be made an issue among believers. The apostle gave the admonition, “The faith you have, have it according to yourself before God. Fortunate is the one who does not judge himself by what he approves.” (14:22)

This could mean that, in matters such as food, drink, and the observance of certain days, the faith believers have is their own, not someone else’s, and it is between them and God. A number of translations make this explicit in their renderings of Romans 14:22. “What you believe about these things should be kept between you and God.” (CEV) “Your personal convictions are a matter of faith between yourself and God.” (J. B. Phillips) “Keep the faith [that] you have to yourself in the presence of God.” (NAB) “If you have some firm conviction, keep it between yourself and God.” (REB) “You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God.” (NLT)

In Romans 14:22, the first phrase about faith may also (on the basis of the oldest extant manuscripts) be understood as a question. “You have faith? According to yourself, have it before God.” The meaning could be that the individual should keep hold of faith as a personal possession in God’s sight. “Within yourself, before God, hold on to what you already believe.” (NJB) Possibly this signifies that faith is a possession to be retained as one that God highly values. Even more important (as the context suggests) is letting love be the governing principle. This significance would harmonize with Paul’s words (1 Corinthians 13:2) that he would be nothing if he had the faith to move mountains but did not have love.

Believers who do not judge or condemn themselves after doing things they initially approved are fortunate. Self-doubts do not trouble them afterward, causing them to feel that they actually sinned when pursuing a certain course of action. (14:22)

The situation with those who have qualms about whether it would be right for them to do something and who then go ahead despite their doubts do not enjoy this desirable state of well-being. If, as Paul noted, the person with qualms about eating did eat, he would not be acting “out of faith.” The faith, trust, or conviction that he was doing the right thing would be lacking. Paul concluded with the principle, “Everything that is not out of faith is sin.” When individuals handle matters in a manner that does not leave them with a clear conscience, they end up with a sense of uneasiness about having done what is wrong. Any action that is not based on the conviction of faith proves to be sin, a failure to live up to the individual’s own internal sense of what is right and wrong. (14:23)

Romans 15:1-33

15:1-3 Plea to observe these principles

In relation to “weak” fellow believers, those who are “strong” would be those who recognize to a fuller extent the kind of freedom that faith in Christ and his sacrificial death has brought about. They would not have scruples about eating, drinking, observing certain days, or engaging in any other activities that in themselves are not morally defiling. Their “weaker” brothers, through the conditioning resulting from past beliefs and practices, would have scruples about acts that are not wrong in themselves. Their consciences would be sensitive regarding aspects of life that posed no problem for those who were strong. Therefore, the strong ones were obligated to show consideration for their weaker brothers. Including himself among the strong, Paul said, “We, the strong, are obligated to bear the weaknesses of the ones who are not strong, and not to be pleasing ourselves.” (15:1)

For one to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong would mean being considerate of their limitations, refraining from any activity that, though not wrong in itself, could seriously trouble them and injure them spiritually. Believers who are strong would act, not to please themselves in doing what they had the right to do, but would, out of love, show regard for the sensitive consciences of their weaker brothers and conduct themselves accordingly. (15:1)

Within the community of believers, all should be concerned about doing what would be pleasing to the “neighbour” or the fellow believer, wanting to do the things that are for his good and thereby to build him up. This would contribute to his being strengthened to continue conducting himself as a disciple of God’s Son. (15:2)

Paul called attention to the fact that Christ had set the example in not pleasing himself and backed this up with a quotation from Psalm 69:9[10] (68:10, LXX), “The reproaches of those reproaching you have fallen on me.” (15:3; see the Notes section.) God’s unique Son did not act in his own interests but willingly gave up his glory as his Father’s intimate and lived as a man subjected to misrepresentation, insult, and abuse, finally to die a shameful death like that of a vile criminal. (Philippians 2:5-8) While on earth, Jesus Christ conveyed his Father’s teaching and faithfully carried out the work his Father had commissioned him to do. Therefore, when Jesus was insulted (as when accused of expelling demons by the ruler of the demons), this meant that his Father, who had sent him, was also being reproached. The force of that reproach, however, fell fully on Jesus.

15: 4-13 Christian service and God’s worldwide glory

Verses 4-7 The hope of God’s worldwide glory

Paul’s quotation came from the writings that fellow believers regarded as holy. Commenting on their value, he continued, “For whatever was written formerly was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the comfort of the [holy] writings we might have hope.” (15:4) In keeping with this principle, the apostle had quoted the psalmist’s words. These words served as instruction for the strong ones to put the interests of others ahead of their own, imitating Christ by choosing to act in a manner that might not have suited personal preference but that contributed to the good of fellow believers. In thus being willing to endure for the sake of others and taking comfort in the assurances found in the sacred writings that this was the right course, believers would have hope, specifically the hope of entering the fullness of their reward upon being found approved in the sight of God and Christ.

The apostle's reference to the God of endurance and of comfort (*paráklesia*) denotes that God is the source of the believers' endurance and comfort. He is the one who enables them to endure in faithfulness and, by means of his spirit and the holy writings, provides them with needed comfort when having to deal with difficult circumstances. (15:5)

Paul's prayer for fellow believers was that God would grant them the capacity to think the same toward one another "according to Christ Jesus, that they might unitedly with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (15:5, 6) This sameness of thought may relate to their having consideration for one another, not allowing conscientious scruples or the lack thereof to cause divisions among them as a family of God's children. "According to Christ" may signify in harmony with Christ's example of not pleasing himself. It could also include the thought of heeding Christ's teaching in every aspect of life. With all believers striving to preserve unity as beloved members of the same spiritual family, they would be in position to glorify the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ unitedly as with one mouth.

Believers should be accepting of one another, manifesting the welcoming spirit that Christ has manifested for all of them. He died for them and, on the basis of their faith in him and what he accomplished through his death, acknowledges them as his brothers. When believers imitate the Son of God in their treatment of one another as beloved members of the same family, they glorify or bring praise to their heavenly Father. They demonstrate that they are truly his children, manifesting the same kind of love that his unique Son has shown and continues to show. (15:7)

Verses 8-13 The world is the ultimate outreach of the gospel

Whereas Jesus accepted or welcomed both Jews and non-Jews who responded to him in faith, he focused on the Jews during his time on earth. Commenting on the reason for this, Paul continued, "For I say, Christ became a servant to the circumcised for the truth of God in order to confirm the promises [expressed] to the forefathers." (15:8) When ministering among the Jews, Jesus Christ revealed his Father to be absolutely trustworthy. He, as the seed of promise, fulfilled God's word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Messianic seed would come through their line of descent and that, through him, peoples of all nations would be blessed. (Genesis 17:15-21; 22:17; 28:13, 14; compare Luke 1:68-75) Thus Jesus served for the "truth of God," undeniably establishing that his Father's promises to the Jewish forefathers had proved to be deserving of complete confidence.

When sending his Son to be born as a human and to live and serve among the Jews, he demonstrated his compassion for them. Through his Son and faith in

him and the benefits of his sacrificial death, they would be forgiven of their sins and come to be his approved children. Gentiles who came to recognize this expression of divine mercy would be moved to glorify or praise God for the mercy he had shown. Paul referred to the holy writings to indicate that this purpose was served when Christ ministered to the Jews. He quoted from Psalm 18:49[50] (17:50, LXX) “Therefore, I will acknowledge you among the nations, and I will sing praises to your name.” (15:9)

In the case of the psalmist, he acknowledged YHWH as the one who had delivered him from his enemies and gratefully raised his voice with joyful praise. That deliverance was an expression of God’s mercy. Likewise, in the case of Jesus, what he taught and did in obedience to his Father’s will, revealed his Father’s compassion. Jesus did not personally go to the non-Jewish peoples to testify about his Father and to praise him, but he did so through his disciples. They made known his acknowledgment and praise of his Father.

Paul also quoted from Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX), “Rejoice, O nations, with his people.” Because of what God would do for his people and the blessings that would result, the non-Jewish peoples would have reason to be glad. In the context of Deuteronomy, the execution of divine justice and manifestation of divine mercy through the atonement for the “land of his people” (or God’s “land and his people”) would occasion the rejoicing. Likewise, God’s arrangement for being forgiven of sins and for coming to be reconciled to him through his Son involves both mercy and justice. (15:10; see the Notes section.)

The apostle quoted a similar passage from Psalm 117:1 (116:1, LXX), “Praise the Lord [YHWH, Masoretic Text], all [you] nations, and let all the peoples praise him.” According to this psalm, the reason for all the peoples to praise YHWH is what he has done for his people. Though Israel often failed to live in harmony with his ways, he continued to be dependable and true to his word and promises. Fittingly, therefore, the apostle used the words of the psalmist to show that people of all the nations should praise God for his mercy to his people. (15:11)

Paul concluded with a quotation from Isaiah 11:10 (LXX), “[There] will be the root of Jesse, and [meaning ‘even’ (based on context)] the one rising up to rule nations; on him, nations will hope.” (15:12; see the Notes section.) By natural descent, Jesus was born in the royal line of David. The royal line existed then in obscurity, resembling a mere “stump.” (Isaiah 11:1) That stump had its root in David’s father Jesse. From this root, Jesus, the foretold Messianic ruler of nations, did come. People of the nations who responded in faith rested their hope on him. They looked forward to the time when they would be united with him

and enjoy the magnificent freedom of God's approved children in the sinless state.

The apostle continued with a prayerful expression directed to the ultimate source of the believers' hope, the fulfilment of which is bound up with Jesus Christ and what he accomplished through his sacrificial death. "[May] the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, in order that you may abound in the hope by the power of holy spirit." (15:13.)

Quotations from the Old Testament

Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament to support the argument in Romans. Like several of the New Testament writers, he draws his quotations from the LXX (Greek) rather than the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that serves as the basis for our English translations. Furthermore, the New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not feel compelled to always quote the text verbatim, often choosing rather to paraphrase and comment on the text as necessary for their own context.

Paul based his prayerful expression on his knowing that those to whom he addressed his letter were believers. His desire for them was that God, the source of their hope, would fill them with joy and peace. This included the joy stemming from their full awareness that they were their heavenly Father's approved children and recipients of his love and care. Peace would be the inner sense of well-being from the assurance that he would continue to aid, guide, and sustain them in their walk of faith. Their hope in seeing the fulfilment of all that God had promised to them as his children would abound, flourishing and growing, because of the powerful working of his spirit within them.

In this letter, Paul had directed strong admonition to believers in Rome, many of whom he did not know personally. It appears that he did not want them to conclude that they were seriously lacking and without believers in their midst who were in position to provide spiritual aid to others.

15: 14-16:27 Christian service and Christian fellowship

15: 14-33 Paul greets the saints in Rome

Addressing them as his "brothers," he expressed confidence that they were "full of goodness" and in possession of ample knowledge to be able to instruct or admonish one another. Unlike the people among whom they lived and who engaged in the vices the apostle had mentioned in the beginning of his letter, the believers in Rome were full of goodness, living upright lives and showing genuine love and concern for others. Among them were those who had been

Christ's disciples even before Paul came to be a believer. (16:7) So the community of believers in Rome did have the essential fullness of knowledge to provide whatever instruction or admonition may have been needed. (15:14)

On the basis of the gracious favour God had given him, however, Paul expressed some points with a measure of boldness, doing so by way of reminder to the believers in Rome. (15:15) It was because of divine favor that he had been constituted a “servant [*leitourgós*] of Christ Jesus to the nations.” (15:16) The Greek designation *leitourgós* described a person who did public service that was commonly associated with things of a sacred nature. In a more general sense, the term could apply to someone who rendered personal service. (Philippians 2:25)

As a servant of Christ Jesus, the apostle engaged in the sacred or priestly service of the “evangel of God” for the purpose of making the “offering of the nations acceptable, sanctified by holy spirit.” The evangel or good news has Christ as its focal point, but his Father is the one who sent him and whose will he carried out when laying down his life in sacrifice. Fittingly, therefore, Paul spoke of the “evangel of God.” The apostle’s sacred service refers to his service in carrying out his apostolic commission to proclaim the glad tidings to people of the nations. His concern for those who became believers was that he might be able to present them as an acceptable offering to God, “sanctified” or made holy through the operation of holy spirit within them. (15:16)

“In Christ,” or as a believer at one with Christ and who had been commissioned as an apostle, Paul had reason for boasting, exulting, or taking pride in things “pertaining to [literally, toward] God.” These things would include everything that Paul, through the gracious divine favour that had been granted him, was able to accomplish in his service to God as a servant of Christ. (15:17)

For his accomplishments he gave all the credit to the Son of God, saying, “For I will not dare say a thing about [anything] that Christ did not do through me.” Through the working of Christ within him, Paul had brought people of the nations to obedience. They submitted to God’s will as disciples of his Son. (15:18)

Non-Jews became obedient on account of the “word” or message about Christ that Paul proclaimed and the “work” that he did, which included the performance of miracles. (15:18) The apostle specifically mentioned the “power of signs and portents,” which he was enabled to do by the “power of holy spirit [God’s spirit, according to other manuscripts].” (15:19) According to the book of Acts, Paul’s miraculous works included liberating others from demon possession, healing all manner of diseases and afflictions, and raising a young man from the dead. (Acts 19:11, 12; 20:8-10)

In proclaiming the “evangel of Christ” or the good news about the Son of God, Paul travelled extensively. The area which he traversed extended from the city of Jerusalem as far as Illyricum, a Roman province on the east side of the Adriatic Sea. (15:19)

The apostle “aspired” (*philotiméomai*) to proclaim the good news about Christ where he had not been “named” or where the glad tidings regarding him had not already been preached. Paul did not want to build on someone else’s foundation, benefiting from the service that others had rendered earlier. (15:20; see the Notes section.)

In speaking of his labours, he appropriated the words of Isaiah 52:15 (LXX), which relate to God’s Messianic servant and found their fulfilment in Christ, “Those who have not been told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.” Through Paul’s activity, persons who had not previously been told about Christ came to “see” him as God’s unique Son, putting their faith in him, and came to understand everything they needed to know concerning him. (15:21)

Paul had often wanted to go to Rome but had been hindered from doing so. (15:22) At the time he dictated this letter to believers there, he had proclaimed the evangel in principal cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. No longer having any new area to be reached in the regions where he had spread the message about Christ, Paul felt that he was in a position to visit believers in Rome, fulfilling a desire that he had entertained for a number of years. His primary objective, though, was to go to Spain and to make a stop in Rome on his way there. After seeing the believers in the city and having the pleasure of being with them for a time, he hoped to have them send him (apparently with their blessing) off to Spain. (15:23, 24; see the Notes section regarding 15:24.)

Before undertaking this westward journey, Paul was heading eastward, back to Jerusalem. The purpose of this trip was to serve the “holy ones,” the believing Jews who were impoverished on account of persecution and adversities. Fellow believers, primarily non-Jews, in Macedonia and Achaia had learned about the plight of their Jewish brothers and were pleased to make a contribution for poor believers in Jerusalem. (15:25, 26)

The apostle considered it most fitting that they were pleased to make this contribution, for they were indebted to their Jewish brothers. This was because the non-Jews had come to share in spiritual blessings through them, and so it was only right for the non-Jews to share material things with their needy Jewish brothers. It was through the initial efforts of Jewish believers that the glad tidings about Christ began to be proclaimed to the non-Jews. Accordingly, non-Jewish believers were indebted to their Jewish brothers for having come to enjoy

the standing of approved children of God and all the privileges and blessings associated therewith. (15:27)

After completing his ministry for the needy believers in Jerusalem, making sure that this contribution (literally, “fruit”) was safely handed over to them, Paul planned to head for Spain and, on his way, to stop in Rome. (15:28) He was confident that his visit would prove to be a blessing to the believers there, for he would be coming “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.” This could mean that the apostle would be coming with the bountiful spiritual gifts Christ grants. Another possibility is that the apostle knew that Christ would fully bless his visit. It does not appear that the “fullness of the blessing of Christ” would be limited to the good news about him, for the believers in Rome had already responded to it in faith. (15:29)

Paul was aware of the personal danger from unbelievers he might face while in Jerusalem. During the course of his ministry in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, he had encountered intense hostility from unbelieving fellow Jews, some of whom were determined to kill him. In the course of an earlier stay at Jerusalem, he fell into a trance while at the temple and heard Jesus tell him to hurry out of the city, for his testimony about him would not be accepted. (Acts 22:17, 18) For this reason, he entreated fellow believers in Rome to pray earnestly to God for him. The Greek term conveying the thought of “earnestly” is the verb *synagonízomai*, which basically means to join someone in a common effort as when fighting or contending. When making his entreaty, Paul did so “through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the spirit.” He based his appeal on the relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ he shared with believers in Rome and the love that the spirit of God had engendered within them. (15:30)

Paul wanted them to pray that he would be rescued from unbelievers (literally, those who disobey) in Judea and that his service for the holy ones in Jerusalem would prove to be acceptable. (15:31) He was deeply concerned that the needy believers in Jerusalem would receive the monetary assistance their non-Jewish brothers had provided. Hoping for a successful outcome, the apostle referred to his desire that, by God’s will, he would get to the believers in Rome “with joy” and be refreshed by their company. (15:32)

After asking them to pray for him, Paul added his own prayerful expression for them, “[May] the God of peace [be] with all of you. Amen [So be it].” The heavenly Father is the “God of peace,” for he is the source of the inner sense of well-being and tranquillity that believers enjoy on account of his love and tender care for them. (15:33)

Notes:

The quotation in Romans 15:3 is identical to the wording of the extant Septuagint text of Psalm 69:9[10] (68:10, LXX), which passage relates to the experience of the psalmist. Paul applied the quotation to Jesus, as what befell the Son of God did fit the words that had been preserved in the holy writings.

In Romans 15:7, numerous manuscripts read, “Christ accepted you,” whereas others say, “Christ accepted us.”

The phrase (in Romans 15:7), “for the glory of God,” could be directly linked to the Son of God, indicating that his acceptance or welcoming of believers resulted in glory to God. A footnote in the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*, sets forth this alternate meaning, *Darum nehmt einander an, wie Christus euch zur Ehre Gottes angenommen hat.* (Therefore accept one another as Christ, for the honor of God, accepted you.)

The words quoted in Romans 15:10 from Deuteronomy 32:43, though found in the Septuagint, are missing in the Masoretic Text and in a preserved Dead Sea Scroll (4QDeutq). In the Septuagint, the entire verse reads, “Rejoice, O heavens, together with him, and worship [prostrate yourselves before] him all you sons of God. Rejoice, O nations, with his people, and prevail for him all [you] angels of God, for the blood of his sons he will avenge, and he will revenge and repay the penalty to [his] enemies, and to those who hate him he will repay, and the Lord will cleanse the land of his people.”

The preserved Dead Sea Scroll text, though agreeing with the Septuagint more than it does with the Masoretic Text, differs in other ways. “Rejoice, O heavens, together with him; and bow down to him all you gods, for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and will render vengeance to his enemies, and will recompense those who hate him, and will atone for the land of his people.” (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*)

The Masoretic Text reads, “Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for the blood of his servants he will avenge, and will take vengeance on his enemies, and will expiate [make atonement for or purify] his land, his people [the land of his people, or his land and his people].”

In Romans 15:12, the quotation from Isaiah 11:10 follows the reading of the Septuagint. While the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah likewise refer to the “root of Jesse” and a turning of people of the nations to him, the wording is different. The Hebrew text refers to the “root of Jesse” as standing up as a “signal for the peoples,” and that the nations would inquire of him or seek him out.

Although the extant Hebrew text is not the same as the Septuagint reading of Isaiah 11:10, this does not affect the application Paul made of the passage, for the primary point is that people of the nations would be turning to the “root of Jesse.” As prophetically portrayed in the Hebrew text, Jesus Christ proved to be like a raised signal or banner that identifies the location for people to assemble. This began to be fulfilled when non-Jewish peoples, starting with Cornelius, his relatives and acquaintances, accepted Jesus Christ in response to the glad tidings proclaimed by his disciples. Through their public proclamation of Christ, his disciples called attention to him as to a raised banner.

In Romans 15:13, a number of manuscripts omit the Greek preposition for “in” (*en*) and the Greek word *eis*, meaning “into” but (in this context) denoting “in order that,” “so that,” or “for the purpose of.”

The Greek word *philotiméomai* literally means “to have a love for honor.” As used by Paul in Romans 15:20, the term denotes “to make a matter of honor,” or “to have the ambition, aim, or aspiration.”

In Romans 15:24, later manuscripts contain an expanded reading for the opening phrase, “Whenever I may be going to Spain, I will come to you.” The oldest extant manuscripts do not include the words, “I will come to you.”

Romans 16: 1-27

16: 1-27 Closing greetings and warnings

Based on Paul’s commending Phoebe to the community of believers in Rome, one may reasonably conclude that she delivered his letter. (16:1) Later manuscripts even contain a subscription that specifically refers to the letter as being sent through Phoebe from Corinth. The context does not clarify in what sense this “sister” was a “servant [feminine form of *diákonos*] of the congregation in Cenchreae” (the port city serving Corinth for shipments to eastern harbours). It is unlikely that Phoebe served in an appointed capacity as a deaconess. She probably ministered to others in a general sense, rendering valuable service to fellow believers. (16:1; see the Notes section.)

Paul requested that the believers in Rome would receive her “in the Lord [in a manner] worthy of the holy ones.” As persons “in” or at one with the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body, the Roman believers rightly were to welcome her as a fellow “holy one,” or one of God’s people. The apostle also asked them to assist her in whatever she might need from them. Indicating that she deserved such aid, he added, “For she also has become a protectress [*prostátis*] of many, even of me.” The Greek term *prostátis* may identify Phoebe as a “patroness.” Possibly she was a woman with considerable means and of high social standing

in the community, making it possible for her to come to the defense of fellow believers when they were falsely accused or to assist them in other ways. (16:2)

Paul mentioned numerous believers to whom he wanted greetings extended. These included a significant number of women (Prisca, Mary, Junia [unless the masculine name Junias is original], Tryphaena, Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus). The apostle's inclusion of women reveals the high regard he had for them and for the service they rendered to fellow disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. (16:3-15)

He identified Prisca (Priscilla, according to other manuscripts) and Aquila as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Like the apostle, this married couple was at one with Christ, individually being members of his body and actively furthering his interests. (16:3) The apostle's mentioning Prisca first may indicate that she excelled her husband in being able to convey the message about Christ to others and in taking the initiative to aid fellow believers. In view of the diminished value the apostle placed on position or status (compare Galatians 2:6), it appears unlikely that he would have chosen to mention Prisca first on account of her having a higher social standing in the Greco-Roman world.

Paul expressed a debt of gratitude to Prisca and Aquila, for they had risked their own lives (literally, "neck") for him (literally, his "soul"). This suggests that they courageously intervened when the apostle's life was threatened. Not only was he grateful to them but so were all the "congregations of the nations," probably meaning all the congregations primarily made up of non-Jewish believers and among whom he had laboured. By exposing themselves to danger for Paul, Prisca and Aquila made it possible for him to continue proclaiming the message about Christ and to minister to believers, with resultant spiritual benefits to all who responded favourably. (16:4)

The apostle had met Aquila and Prisca when they came to Corinth at the time Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. He lived and worked with them in the tentmaker trade, and they later accompanied him to Ephesus. There they continued to live after he left by ship for Caesarea, returning to Syrian Antioch upon first traveling from Caesarea to Jerusalem. While in Ephesus, Prisca and Aquila assisted Apollos to gain a better understanding of "the Way," that is, the way of life marked by attachment to Christ through loyal imitation of his example and faithful adherence to his teaching. (Acts 18:1-3, 18-26)

Sometime after Claudius' decree ceased to be in effect, Aquila and Prisca returned to Rome. Their home served as a meeting place for a congregation of believers. This likely was a comparatively small home, and so the group may have numbered between 10 and 20 persons. Paul asked that greetings be extended to all of them. (16:5)

Others whom the apostle wanted to be greeted were Epaenetus, Mary, Andronicus, Junias or Junia (Julia, according to other manuscripts), Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, those of the household of Aristobulus, Herodion, those of the household of Narcissus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, the mother of Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, “and the brothers with them,” Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and “all the holy ones with them.”

Paul affectionately referred to Epaenetus as “my beloved.” He spoke of him as the “firstfruits of Asia in Christ.” This may mean that Epaenetus was the first person in the Roman province of Asia (a region in the western part of modern-day Turkey) to have become a believer through Paul’s ministry. (16:5)

The many labors Mary performed for believers in Rome doubtless included giving aid to needy ones. (16:6) She must have been exemplary in her love and concern for fellow believers, hospitably opening up her home to them, washing their feet, and giving food and clothing to those in need. (Compare Acts 9:36, 39; 1 Timothy 5:10.)

Andronicus and Junias were Paul’s relatives (*syngenés*). The Greek word *syngenés* could simply mean a “fellow Jew.” Since, however, Paul did not identify all his fellow Jews as such, it appears likely that the believers to whom he did refer in this way were more closely related to him. At one time, Andronicus and Junias shared imprisonment with Paul, for he calls them “my fellow prisoners.” Based on their being mentioned together, the two of them may have been brothers. They were among the early disciples of Christ, having been “in” or at one with him before Paul became a believer. As early disciples, they had a fine reputation (literally, “are notable”) among the “apostles,” probably meaning those numbered among the “twelve.” There is a measure of uncertainty about whether “Junias” is to be regarded as a woman’s name (“Junia”), suggesting the possibility that Andronicus and Junia were either a married couple or brother and sister. The oldest extant manuscript (P46) does contain a woman’s name (Julia), but this has commonly been regarded as a scribal error. (16:7; see the Notes section.)

Ampliatus, depending on the manuscript reading, is called either “the beloved in the Lord” or “my beloved in the Lord.” As a believer at one with the Lord Jesus Christ, he doubtless endeared himself to fellow believers by his caring disposition and loving deeds. Whether Paul affectionately referred to him as “my beloved” or, in a broader sense, as “the beloved” is immaterial to his identity as a beloved believer. (16:8)

Paul acknowledged Urbanus as “our fellow worker in Christ.” Urbanus was at one with the Son of God and, like the apostle, actively advanced his cause. (16:9)

As other members of the family of God’s children for whom he had affection, Paul called Stachys “my beloved.” (16:9)

The apostle referred to Apelles as “the approved one in Christ.” This could signify that Apelles had faithfully endured trials and so was a tested member of Christ’s body. (16:10)

No specifics are provided about those “from Aristobulus.” Nothing is known about this Aristobulus or the relationship these particular members of his household had to him. (16:10)

Herodion, like Andronicus and Junias (or Junia), was one of Paul’s relatives. (16:11)

As in the case of Aristobulus, nothing is known about Narcissus. At least some “from Narcissus” or members of his household were “in the Lord” (united to the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body), but their relationship to Narcissus is not known. (16:11)

Tryphaena and Tryphosa may have been sisters. Their laboring in the Lord doubtless included coming to the aid of needy fellow believers. (16:12)

Like others who are referred to as “beloved,” Persis must have endeared himself to fellow believers, for he performed much labor in the Lord. As a devoted disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, Persis would have been working hard for fellow believers, doing what he could to assist them to the full extent of his ability. (16:12)

Rufus is identified as “the chosen one in the Lord.” As such, he was one of God’s chosen people who was at one with the Lord Jesus Christ. Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene who was impressed into service to carry the beam when Jesus could no longer do so. (Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) The mother of Rufus must have been advanced in years, which may be why Paul affectionately called her “his mother and mine.” (16:13)

Possibly Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the “brothers with them” constituted a group of believers who regularly met together in a home for spiritual fellowship. (16:14)

Perhaps another group of believers with arrangements to meet regularly included Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and “all the holy ones with them.” (16:15)

All believers were part of the family of God’s children. Appropriately, therefore, Paul encouraged them to greet one another with a “holy kiss,” a kiss that reflected their pure standing as fellow believers. Additionally, he extended the greetings of “all the congregations of Christ,” which may be understood to mean all the communities of believers with whom Paul had personal contact. (16:16)

Deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the disciples in Rome, he admonished them to watch out for those who would cause divisions and offenses among them, deviating from the teaching they had learned. They were to avoid such persons. (16:17)

These proponents of falsehood posed a threat to the spiritual welfare of believers, for they proved to be slaves of “their own belly” or their own appetites or sensual desires. They were no servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. With smooth talk and flattery (literally, “blessing”), “they deceive the hearts of the innocent,” the guileless, or the unsuspecting ones. In this case, “hearts” is probably to be understood to mean the minds, as the corrupt ones, with plausible reasoning and seeming display of kindly interest, tried to seduce others to believe falsehoods. (16:18)

News about the “obedience” of Roman believers came to be widely known. (16:19) It is understandable that many throughout the Greco-Roman world would have learned about their obedient response to the good news about the Son of God. A considerable amount of travel occurred between the city and other parts of the Roman Empire. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 regarding how widely the faith of the Thessalonian believers came to be known.)

Nevertheless, the apostle, though he rejoiced over them on account of their obedience, expressed loving concern for them, desiring that they maintain their divinely approved standing. He exhorted them “to be wise in [what is] good, but innocent in [what is] bad.” When it came to living an upright life and doing what is good for others, they were to manifest the kind of wisdom reflective of exemplary adults. With reference to bad, however, they were to be like innocent small children who are unacquainted with the debased and hateful practices of a world alienated from God. (16:19)

The apostle assured his fellow believers that the “God of peace” would shortly crush Satan under their feet. (16:20) In the context of Paul’s letter, this appears to relate to the failure of Satan’s efforts to cause divisions through teachers of falsehood. (16:17) Paul was confident that Satan’s influence would not succeed

in disrupting the peace that God gives. With the help of their heavenly Father, they would triumph and the peace and unity of the community of believers would be preserved. Thus, thanks to the aid God provided, Satan would be crushed under their feet.

According to the oldest extant manuscripts, Paul added, “The favor of our Lord Jesus [be] with you.” (16:20; see the Notes section.) For believers in Rome to have Jesus’ gracious favour rest upon them would mean that they would continue to benefit from his aid and guidance.

The apostle’s fellow worker, Timothy, and his own “relatives” Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater extended greetings. (16:2) If Jason is the same person as the one with whom Paul and Silas stayed in Thessalonica, this could suggest that he, Lucius, and Sosipater were closer relatives of the apostle than were other fellow Jews. It would have been natural for a believing relative to have accommodated Paul in his home. (Acts 17:5-9)

Tertius identified himself as the one who actually wrote the letter, which the apostle dictated to him. He personally included his greeting. The words “in the Lord” may either mean that Tertius extended his greetings in the Lord (or as a fellow believer) or that he wrote the letter in the service of the Lord. (16:22) Translators, either in the main text or in footnotes, have rendered this verse accordingly. “I, Tertius, also send my greetings. I am a follower of the Lord, and I wrote this letter.” (CEV) “I, Tertius, the one who is writing this letter for Paul, send my greetings, too, as a Christian brother.” (NLT) “I Tertius, who took this letter down, add my Christian greetings.” (REB) “I Tertius, writing this letter in the Lord, greet you.” (NRSV, footnote) “I Tertius, who penned this epistle in the Lord, greet you.” (HCSB) *Auch ich, Tertius, der ich diesen Brief im Dienst für den Herrn niedergeschrieben habe, grüße euch.* (Also I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter in service for the Lord, greet you.) (German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*)

Gaius, whose greetings are included, was one of the few believers in Corinth whom Paul had personally baptized. (1 Corinthians 1:14) At the time, the apostle was staying in his home. Gaius is referred to as both Paul’s host and that of the whole congregation. This indicates that the home of Gaius served as a meeting place for a group of believers, and all of them also sent their greetings. The list of those sending greetings ends with Erastus and Quartus. (16:23)

It is uncertain whether Erastus is the same person referred to in Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20 or on a Latin inscription discovered at Corinth in 1929. In the letter to the Romans, the Greek expression *oikonomos tés pόleos* identifies him as an official or former official of Corinth. The Greek designation has been understood to mean either the “treasurer of the city” or the “steward of the city.”

Quartus is called “the brother” (often rendered “our brother” in modern translations). This may indicate that believers in Rome personally knew him as their brother in Christ. The name itself is a Roman name, and formerly he may have lived in the city. (16:23; see the Notes section regarding 16:24 in connection with 16:20.)

God was the one with the power to strengthen the Roman believers in faith. When referring to “my evangel,” Paul meant the glad tidings about Jesus Christ that he proclaimed. The apostle’s prayerful desire was that the believers in Rome would be strengthened “according to [the] evangel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that has been hidden for past ages [literally, ‘eternal times’].” The means by which God would make believers firm in faith is the evangel or good news that Paul made known. This evangel is clearly identified as relating to Jesus Christ, for it is a “proclamation of Jesus Christ,” with a specific focus on what he accomplished through his sacrificial death. Just how Jews and non-Jews would come to be reconciled to God as his approved children remained a concealed mystery in past ages, but the good news about Jesus Christ revealed how this would take place. (16:25)

For this reason, Paul could say that the mystery has “now” been disclosed. According to the “command of the eternal God,” or his will, the mystery was revealed, and this disclosure was made known “through the prophetic scriptures.” When Paul and other believers proclaimed the message about Christ, they used the prophetic scriptures to explain the significance of his death and resurrection and what he had made possible for all those who would respond in faith. (Acts 13:23-41; 17:2, 3, 11; 26:22, 23) Paul gave the reason the mystery was made known to people of “all the nations” as being “obedience of faith.” As in Romans 1:5, “obedience of faith” could mean either the obedience resulting from faith or the obedient response in faith to the message about Jesus Christ. (16:26)

The apostle concluded by ascribing eternal glory or praise to God, the one who is uniquely wise. Paul did so “through Jesus Christ,” for it is through his Son that the Father effected the reconciliation to him that believers could enjoy. Fittingly, the ascription of glory to God ends with “amen” (so be it). (16:27)

Notes:

In Romans 16:1, manuscripts vary, referring to Phoebe either as “our sister” or “your sister.”

In Romans 16:7, the phrase “are notable among the apostles” could mean that they were themselves prominent apostles in the community of believers, though

not of the twelve. This meaning would rule out the possibility that one of the names could have been that of a woman.

In Romans 16:20, numerous later manuscripts add “Christ” after “Jesus.” Another manuscript reading omits the words in verse 20 but places them after verse 23, and there are manuscripts that include the words in verse 20 and also after verse 23. For this reason, translations based on the more recent extant manuscripts have the words as part of verse 20 and as a separate verse 24 (which is commonly omitted in modern translations). Most manuscripts that include the words that appear in translations containing verse 24 read, “The favor of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with all of you. Amen.” Still another variant reading follows with the prayerful expression after verse 27 (not after verse 23).

After “my relatives” (in Romans 16:21), a number of manuscripts add, “and all the congregations of Christ.”

Manuscripts vary considerably in the placement of the words of Romans 16:25-27. These words appear at the end of chapter 14, of chapter 15, or of both chapters 14 and 16. In some manuscripts, they are omitted entirely.

Women in Paul’s greetings. Modern critics have often faulted Paul for his ‘male chauvinist’ attitude towards women in the church. It is notable that at least nine women are mentioned by Paul among those who had done much for him and in service to the Lord.

God’s glory lost and regained

In the Bible as a whole

In the book of Romans

Paradise lost

Ruin

Genesis 1-3

God’s glory forfeited 1:18-3:8

Whole world under sin, 3:9-20

God’s plan of salvation

Redemption

Genesis 4 - Revelation

Gospel of God , 1.1 –

Justification, 3:21-5:21; sanctification,
6:1-8:28;
glorification, 8:9--39

Paradise regained

Study Questionnaire on Romans

We welcome you to this Study. We would like to suggest that one of the most important things for the disciple to do is read, read, and read the Book of Romans with a prayerful attitude. Doing this, the Lord will make His Word clear.

Chapter 1:1-17 Introduction

V. 1 Who was the author?

What is his relation to Jesus Christ? What other items imply this relation?

See also I Cor. 4:1; II Cor. 6:4

What are the qualifications of an apostle?

See Acts 1:21-22

Was Paul qualified?

Did he see the Lord? See Acts 9:1-31, 22:5-16, 26:1-20

Was he taught by the Lord? See Gal. 1:11f

Is there other evidence that he was an apostle?

See II Cor. 12:12

See Acts 13:2, I Tim. 2:7

What was Paul called to do?

See Acts 9:15, 14:14, 22:21, 26:16f

See Gal. 1:16, 2:2, 2:9

How did Paul compare to the other Apostles?

See I Cor. 15:8

See I Cor 15:9

See II Cor. 11:5-6, 12:11

Is the name apostle applied to any others beside the twelve and Paul?

See Acts 14:14

See I Thess. 1:1 with 2:6

See Hebrews 3:1

What does "separated unto the gospel imply?"

General background

Where did Paul write Romans?

a. See Rom. 15:25 and I Cor. 16:1-4

(Note II Cor. 9:4, 12:20, 13:2, Acts 20:2-3 tells about him going or being there)

b. See Rom. 16:1 Where is Cenchreae?

c. See Rom. 16:23 and I Cor. 1:14 about Gaius

d. See Rom. 16:23, II Tim. 4:20 and Acts 19:21, 19:29 about Erastus.

When was the book written?

Year

Relation to the missionary journeys

Relation to Galatians, Corinthians, Ephesians

(note - how is the subjects matter of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians relate?)

Why did Paul write the book?

See Rom. 1:13, 15:23

Why would Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles wish to visit Rome?

See Rom. 1:10-12, Acts 23:11 with 28:31

The Church at Rome

What was the background of its members? See Rom 4:1, 1:13, 11:13; 11:35.

What would Acts 28:21-22 indicate about the number of Jews?

How long was the church in existence? See Rom. 1:8, 15:23

Who may have been the founders? See Acts 2:10.

Was Peter the founder (this is the Roman Catholic view)?

See Acts 19:21, Rom. 15:20, II Cor. 10:16

Romans in relation to the other epistles

Why is it first? Because first in _____.

Also first in _____.

Romans chapters 1 to 8 message similar to _____.

Romans chapters 9 to 11 message similar to _____.

Romans chapters 12 to 16 message similar to _____.

V. 2 What was promised?

See Gal. 3:8, Eph. 1:4, 2:11-3:18, col. 1:26-27

V. 3 Where is the genealogical line to David recorded.

Where else is descendence from David mentioned?

V. 4 How was He declared to be the Son?

Contrast this to Matt. 27:42

V. 5 What did we receive?

What does it bring about?

What people will it work its results?

V. 7 Who are saints?

Compare answer with the Catholic view of sainthood.

V. 8-9 How would you describe this passage?

- V. 10-12 Why did Paul want to visit them? _____
- V. 13 What group do the brethren belong to?
- V. 14 In what way is Paul a "debtor" (KJV)?
See newer versions.
See I Cor. 9:15-18. What does this add to this passage?
To whom is Paul a "debtor"? Answer with one word.
- V. 16 How might this verse be described?
Why would one be ashamed of the gospel?
See Mark 8:38, Matt 10:33, Luke 12:8
- V. 17 Where is this quotation from?
Is it quoted any other places in the New Testament?

Chapter 1:18-32 The Gentiles under sin

- V. 18 What is the wrath of revealed against?
Does it sound like those who do these things will be saved?
- V. 19-20 Do any have an excuse?
- V. 21-23 Which came first, knowing God or darkened minds?
Is man always wise, and make the right choice?
What was exchanged?
- V. 24-25 Why did God give them up?
How does free will relate to this?
- V. 26-27 Why did God give them up?
- V. 28-31 Why did God give them up?
- V. 32 How does free will relate to this verse?
See James 1:13-16. Who is to blame for sin?

Summarize the above in your own words:

Chapter 2:1-16 The Jew is no better - he too is under sin

- V. 1 Is this addressed to Jews or Gentiles? See verse 17
When is judging condemned?
What are the Jews doing?
How do you think this made the Jews feel? Remember they thought they were much better than the Gentiles.
- V. 2-3 What do they face?
Compare with verse 11-12
- V. 4 How is this verse useful in soul winning?
- V. 6-10 On what basis does God judge men?
See Matt. 16:27, John 5:29, Acts 10:34-35, Col. 3:23-25, II Thess. 1:8, Heb. 5:9, Rev 20:12
Explain how this basis relates to justification by faith.

Why might verse 9 be surprising to the Jews?

V. 11-12 Who will perish?

V. 13 Why will the Jew be judged and punished according to the law?

V. 14-16 What is Paul writing about, a method of justification or the principles of judgement?

Is there any differences of the basis of judgement between the Jews and the Gentiles?

Do any Gentiles by nature do what the law requires?

Summarize the above:

Chapter 2:17-29 The Jew under sin and judgement.

V. 17-20 Into what subtle trap of Satan had the Jews fallen?

V. 21-23 What is the actual moral condition of the Jew?

V. 24 Could this be said of some today? Is it?

V. 25-27 What is God actually looking for in His people?

V. 28-29 Who is the real Jew?

What does this mean for us?

Chapter 3:1-20 The advantage of being a Jew

V. 1-2 What advantage has the Jew?

How does this build on chapter 2?

What objection of the Jews is Paul going to answer?

V. 3-4 Remembering that God promised to be the God of the Jews, does their unfaithfulness change this?

V. 5-8 If the Jews' unfaithfulness shows the justice of God, loan this line of reasoning exempt them from judgement and punishment?

How does Paul answer?

V. 9-18 Why are the Jews not better than others?

V. 19-20 What is the purpose of the law?

What can't it do?

Chapter 3:21-31 How man is justified

V. 21-26 How is righteousness obtained?

What is grace? See Titus 2:11, Romans 6, etc.

How are faith and grace related?

How was it brought about?

What does "propitiation" (KJV) mean? (verse 25)

V. 27-28 Can we boast?

What were the Jews doing?

V. 29-30 How do the Jews and Gentiles stand before God?

V. 31 How is the law upheld?

Chapter 4 Abraham's faith

V. 1-5 How was Abraham justified?

What verse is quoted here?

Look up the meaning of the word "counter." (KJV)

Why are works of no value before we are saved?

Are works of value after we are saved? See Eph 2:10; James 2:21-22

V. 6-8 Is David speaking of rewarding the righteous or the unorth?

V. 19-22 How strong was Abraham's faith?

V. 23-25 Is our situation comparable to Abraham's?

How did Jesus redeem us?

Chapter 5. Sin and grace

V. 1-5 What are the fruits of our justification?

How can we glory in tribulation?

When is the Holy Spirit "given unto us"

V. 6-9 What is the means of our justification?

Compare with 3:25.

V. 10-11 In what way are we saved through Christ's life?

Compare with 6:4-5

V. 12-14 What brought death to all men?

Do we die because of Adam's sin or our sins?

Is sin dependent on the law? See 4:15.

How was men's sin during the time from Adam to Moses different from Adam's sin?

Way did death occur during the Adam to Moses time period?

Note: This passage is a most controversial one. Did Adam's sin cause all men to die or did he introduce into the human race a nature which cause all men to sin?

How is Adam a type of Christ? See I Cor. 15:22. Compare the effects of each. Is there a contrast in this type?

V. 15-19 How does our gain through Christ compare with our loss through the fall of Adam?

How is it possible for one man to atone for the sins of the whole world?

How much emphasis is there on "free gift"? What is the effect of law? See 3:20

Does law or grace give eternal life?

Chapter 6 New life in Christ

V. 1-2 Does salvation by grace excuse sin?

 Why did Paul ask this question?

V. 3-4 When does this baptism take place?

 What baptism is he writing about? See I Cor. 12:13

 Does water baptism regenerate a soul?

 When Paul writes about baptism, is he writing about the mode of baptism, or the effect of baptism?

 See Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:12

 Is our "burial" spiritual or literal? What about "crucified" (verse 6), "died" (verse 8), "circumcise" (Col. 2:12)?

V. 5 What is the resurrection experience spoken of here?

 See also Eph. 2:5-6, Col. 3

 Compare to 7:1-4

V. 9 How many offerings did Christ need to make?

 Compare with the Catholic view.

 See Hebrews 10:1, 11, 1.

V. 10-11 See Luke 9:23

V. 12-14 How was sin's dominion broken?

 See 8:2-3

V. 16 How important is the question of whom we serve?

V. 17 When were we slaves of sin? See 1:5, 15:18, 16:26

 What are we now?

V. 21 What would we have gotten once?

V. 22 What two returns does the Christian get?

V. 23 How do the wages compare with the gift?

 Read Matt. 20:1-16

Chapter 7 Free from the Law

V. 1 How is one freed from the law?

V. 2-3 What does this say about divorce and remarriage?

V. 4-6 How did the Christian die to the law?

 See 6:4,5,8

 What is the "oldness of the law" (KJV)? See newer version.

V. 7 Is the law sin?

V. 8-11 In what sense was he dead? saved or lost?

 Compare with 8:13, 3:19-20.

V. 12 The law is _____.

V. 14 Is Paul speaking of his former unregenerated state or after his regeneration?

Why is the answer to this question important?

What type of person is carnally minded? See 8:5-9, 13:14, 6:13-14, 16, 21-22.

V. 15-22 Does being energetic and wanting to do right prove that one has a right relation to God?

V. 23 Is a regenerated person under the law of sin? See 8:2

V. 24-25a What is the way of escape?

V. 25b Does this summarize the chapter?

Chapter 8 The Spirit of Life

V. 1 Who is the one "in Christ"?

V. 2-3 What can the "law of the Spirit" do that the old law could not?

V. 4 What is the just requirement of the law?

How was it fulfilled?

V. 5-8 In how many ways are the flesh and the Spirit contrasted?

See Gal. 5:16-26

V. 9 What must one have to be Christ's?

V. 10-13 What is the Spirit's work in this conflict with the flesh?

V. 14-16 Those who are led by the Spirit are _____.

Thereby we speak of God as our_____.

Do we need to fear God?

V. 17 With whom are we "joint-heirs" (KJV)?

Under what condition?

V. 18-22 What does the imperfection of the present creation point to? See II Peter 3:13

V. 23 What part of our inheritance do we have now?

Compare with Eph. 1:13-14

V. 26-27 How does the Holy Spirit help us in our prayers?

Who makes the "groanings" (KJV)?

V. 28 How does this verse relate to preceding thoughts?

Note verse 18, 26

V. 29-30 What had God provided?

Do these steps necessarily follow one another?

See Matt. 22:14

V. 31-39 Can anything outside the Christian rob him of his salvation?

What light does James 1:13-15 give on this passage?

What can separate us from the love of God?

Chapter 9 God's People--Believing remnant from Israel and the believing Gentile Israel's rejection and the Gentile's acceptance.

V. 1-3 How much sorrow did the Jew's rejection of the Gospel bring to Paul?

V. 4-5 What advantages and privileges did the Jew have?

Should they have been the first to accept Jesus Christ?

V. 6-8 Did Israel's rejection show that God was unfaithful?

Did their ancestry guarantee favor with God?

V. 9-13 Who determined which of Abraham's descendants would become the heirs of the promise given to him?

Were the heirs of the promise dependent on birthright or works?

Did this election primarily concern individuals or nations?

Is Israel as a nation or Jacob as an individual the primary concern here?

Did Jacob and his descendants receive eternal life because of their call?

What did they receive?

V. 14 Did God's choice of the nation Israel make him unjust?

V. 15-16 On what basis did God make His choice?

V. 17-18 What purpose did God have for Pharaoh?

Was he raised up for eternal damnation or to be a governmental leader God could use?

Why was "pharaoh's heart hardened"? Compare 1:24, 26, 28.

See Exodus 5:2, 8:15.

See also Exodus 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10.

Was this the results of God working through natural laws?

V. 19-20 Can man question God's choices?

V. 21 Who is the potter? Who is the clay? Is the clay individuals or national Israel?

Read Jeremiah 18:1-11

V. 22 Why are they fitted for destruction?

Who are the "vessels of wrath"?

See Hebrews 3:12.

Is God unjust if He rejects unbelieving Israelites and saves Gentiles who believe? Did God quickly condemn the unbelieving Israelites or was He patient and long-suffering with them.

How did God use "the vessels of wrath"?

V. 23-24 Who has God now elected to be vessels of mercy? Israel, Gentiles or both?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22, Acts 10:34.

V. 25-26 Who does Paul apply Hosea's words, "not my people" and "not beloved" to?

V. 27-28 How many Israelites will be saved? Compare Matthew 7:13-14.

V. 29 Why didn't God reject and forget the Jews?

V. 30 Why did the Gentiles obtain righteousness?

V. 31-33 Why did the Jews not succeed in obtaining righteousness?

Who did they stumble over? See Matthew 21:38, 42

See I Peter 2:4-8.

Chapter 10 The cause of the Jew's failure

V. 1 Is Paul concerned about the Jew's spiritual state?

Does the Scriptures anywhere else speak of prayer for the unsaved?

V. 2-4 What was the Jew's basic problem?

Note how this relates back to 9:30-33.

How were they trying to attain righteousness?

Were they faithful in this attempt? See Hebrews 8:9, Matthew 15:6.

V. 5 What is necessary if one is going to obtain righteousness through the law?

See Leviticus 18:5 and Galatians 3:10.

V. 6-8 Is the Gospel something hard or far off? Refer to Deuteronomy 30:11-14

V. 9-11 What two things are necessary for salvation?

V. 12 Are there two groups of people with different ways to obtain righteousness before God?

V. 13 Does this verse say anything about the nationality of the believer?

V. 14-15 Why should the Gospel be universally preached

See verse 13

V. 16 Did the Jew believe the Gospel when he heard it?

V. 18 How much opportunity did the Jew have to believe?

V. 19-21 What had Isaiah prophesied? Who found God?

Was God patient with Israel?

Chapter 11 The Jewish rejection is not total or final

V. 1 What evidence does Paul offer to show that God did not completely reject Israel?

V. 2-4 How many were saved from Israel in Elijah's days? See 9:27, I Kings 19:9-18.

V. 5 Was there any difference in the number who were saved in Paul's day?

V. 5-6 On what basis is the remnant chosen? See Ephesians 2:8.

V. 7 What was the basis for the election of some and the hardening of others?

Was it due to God or man? Review 9:30-33.

What did God want? See 11:32, Titus 2:11, I Timothy 2:4.

V. 8-10 See Matthew 13:14-15

Why has God given them the spirit of slumber?

Note: In the preceding verses (Matthew 13:12) we see how blessing and cursing can become progressive, as God responds to our own choices.

See also John 12:36-43

V. 11 Did God completely cast away Israel?

What good came out of Israel's rejection? How did it come?

See Matthew 22:8-9, Acts 18:5-6. When Israel rejected the Gospel what did the apostles do?

How did Israel react?

V. 12 What will be the results of Israel's conversion?

V. 13-14 What did Paul hope to do by winning Gentiles to Christ?

V. 15 What is meant by "life from the dead." How does this expand on the previous verse?

V. 16 Who are the "first fruits" and the "root"?

Who are the "whole lump" and the "branches"?

What must they have in common?

V. 17 Who was broken off?

Who is the wide olive shoot?

V. 18-22 Why shouldn't the "wild olive shoot" boast?

What can happen to them?

See Hebrews 3:8-13.

V. 23-24 Can the natural branches be grafted back in?

V. 25 Should the Gentiles think they are better than the Jews, and look down on them?

How will the hardening be on part of Israel?

V. 26-27 What is going to happen to Israel?

When will it happen? Note Luke 21:24.

See Isaiah 59:20-21, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 11:16-20, 36:22-3???

V. 28-32 To whom is this addressed?

Is the mercy God will offer to different than the Gentile received?

V. 33-36 What is our response when we see God's plan of redemption and how it is worked out among the Jews and Gentiles?

Chapter 12 The Christian Life

V. 1 What is the Christian to present?

V. 2 Negatively we are to _____.

Positively we are to _____.

How are these interrelated?

How important are these verses to the Christian life?

What do they mean in our lives?

V.s 3 What danger should we avoid?

What is meant by "measure of faith"?

V. 4-8 Do we all have the same gifts?

See Ephesians 4:7, 10-16.

V. 9 What is the meaning of "dissimulation" (KJV)?

How does love express itself?

V. 10 How essential is this love? See John 13:35, I John 3:15.

V. 11 What is meant by "not slothful in business" (KJV)?

How does this tie in with the rest of the verse?

V. 13 Through who does God work to help the needy Christian?

Is there any other type of giving in the New Testament?

V. 14 See Matthew 5:44

V. 15 How much do Christians share together?

V. 16 How are we to live together?

V. 17-18 What do we do when faced with evil?

V. 19-21 Why can't we avenge? What are we to do?

In what sense does the Christian "heap coals of fire on his head?"

Chapter 13:1-7 The Christian and The State

V. 1 Where does the government leaders obtain their power?

See John 19:10-11, Daniel 2:21.

V. 2 Should the Christian take part in acts of civil disobedience and rebellion against governments?

Give two reasons.

V. 3-4 Who should fear the government?

V. 5 Why should one be subject to the government?

Can one ever disobey the authorities? See Acts 5:29, Mark 12:14.

See I Peter 2:13, Titus 3:1.

V. 6-7 Should the Christian pay his taxes? Any exceptions?

Chapter 13:8-14 Live by love and keep alert

V. 8-10 How do we fulfil the law?

See Galatians 5:14, Matthew 22:34-40

V. 11-12 What should we keep in mind?

V. 12-13 How does the preceding verses effect our lives?

See Matthew 14:42-44, I Thessalonians 5:1-6, II Peter 3:9-18

V. 14 What about satisfying our bodily lusts and carnal desires?

See 8:13, Galatians 5:16-24.

Chapter 14 Our Christian Brother and Opinions

V. 1 What disputes should be avoided? With whom?

What type of person is this weak one? See verse 6.

V. 2 What issue does Paul give as an example?

Is there a Bible principle involved here?

V. 3-4 What is each side to do?

Must a person become a vegetarian to please the vegetarian?

See I Timothy 4:3-4.

V. 5 What issue does Paul give as a second example?

What days is Paul referring to? See Colossians 2:16, Galatians 4:10.

- V. 6-9 What is really important?
- V. 10-12 Should we pass judgement on issues not involving Biblical principles?
 What about issues involving Biblical principles?
 See I Cor. 5:12-13.
 What will each of us do someday?
- V. 13 What must we avoid?
- V. 14 Why does something clean become unclean? See verse 23
- V. 15 What is to control our actions.
- V. 17 What issues was Paul speaking about?
 See I Corinthians 8, Hebrews 13:9.
 What is important in the kingdom of God?
- V. 19 What should we pursue?
- V. 20-21 What must we avoid?
 Does this chapter give the Christian license or limits his action?
- V. 23 How must a Christian control his life?
 See James 4:17.

Chapter 15:1-13 Christ is our example

- V. 1 How does this verse relate to the proceeding chapter?
 Should we do everything we want to do?
- V. 2 What should we do?
- V. 3 Whom should we imitate?
- V. 4 Is there value in Old Testament Scriptures?
- V. 5-6 What should be the results of our lives?
- V. 7 See how this verse relates to 14:1.
- V. 8-9 What did Christ do, and why? Note Matthew 15:24.
- V. 9-12 Who are called to receive benefits of the promises?
 When was this calling revealed?
- V. 13 What blessings do we receive?

Chapter 15:14-33 Paul's personal remarks

- V. 14 What was Paul's opinion of the Roman's Christians?
 How should they be able to help each other?
- V. 15-16 What did Paul want them to understand?
- V. 17-21 What did Paul want to do?
 How much effect did he put forth?
- V. 22 What hindered Paul coming to them?
- V. 23-26 What is Paul's plans?
- V. 26-27 Why did these Christians wish to share with those at Jerusalem?
 See II Corinthians 8:1-15.
- V. 28-29 What was Paul's plans?

V. 30-32 Why was Paul interested in their prayers?

Do you think the Judea unbelievers were friends in light of his conversion and efforts to spread the gospel?

Chapter 16 Conclusion

V. 1-2 What type of person was Phoebe?

Where is Cenchrae located?

V. 3-4 In what sense have they "laid down their own necks"?

V. 5 Where did some of the early congregations meet?

Are large, elaborate church buildings needed?

< What distinction is attributed to Epaenetus?

V. 6-15 What does this greeting say of Paul's character?

V. 16 How were the early church to greet one another?

V. 17 Who should be avoided?

See II Thessalonians 3:6-15, Titus 3:10

V. 18 What danger do those who create dissensions and difficulties cause?

Read I Corinthians 1 and 2, II Corinthians 1:13, 11:6.

V. 19-20 What type of church existed at Rome?

V. 21-23 Does Paul leave room for others?

V. 25 What is the mystery he speaks of?

See I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 2:19, Colossians 2:2 and I Timothy 3:9

V. 26 What does this mystery do?

Final Evaluation

Romans has long been the mainstay of Christian theology. Most of its technical terms, such as justification, imputation, adoption, and sanctification, are drawn from the vocabulary of this epistle, and the structure of its argument provides the backbone of Christian thought. Its logical method is obvious. First, the theme is announced: ". . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (1:16). The need for that power is shown by the fall of the world, Jew and Gentile alike, so that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10). If, then, all are helpless and condemned, relief must come from without by providing for them both a legal and a personal righteousness. This is found in Christ, "whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime" (3:25). Since the sinner cannot earn his salvation, this righteousness must be accepted by faith. Individually and racially man is restored to his right position before God through the grace manifested in Christ.

Chapters 6 through 8 deal with the personal problems that rise out of the new spiritual relationships. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (6:1). "Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace?" (6:15). "Is the law sin?" (7:7). "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (7:24). All these questions are answered by the description of the personal life in the Spirit given in chapter 8.

The section comprising chapters 9 through 11 deals with a broader question. Has God, by instituting salvation for all by faith, invalidated the covenant with Israel that was established through the law? Paul points out that the choice of the Gentiles is quite in keeping with God's original procedure of choosing Jacob rather than Esau. It is no less right for God to choose the Gentiles for salvation than it was right for him to choose Israel to be the vehicle of his revelation. His will is ultimate; beyond it there is no court of appeal. Furthermore, Israel's unbelief had forfeited her standing, so that the Gentile is now being given his day before God. The time may come when the Gentiles' opportunity will close (11:25), and then the believers of Israel shall enter into their heritage. The present dealing of God with Gentiles is neither arbitrary nor accidental, but is in full accordance with the divine plan.

The practical section of Romans makes close ethical application of the salvation described in the first eleven chapters. The redeemed individual is obligated to live a righteous life: "whether we live . . . or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (14:8-9). The conclusion (15:14-33) expresses Paul's own sense of debt to Christ for making known the gospel "not where Christ was *already* named" (15:20). He translated the obligation of the gospel of righteousness into missionary terms.

Romans is a superb example of the integration of doctrine with missionary purpose. Had Paul not believed that men were lost and that God had provided righteousness for them, he would not have been a missionary. Had he not been an active missionary, he never would have formulated so systematic a presentation of truth as Romans. It illustrates what he did when he "established" the converts in his churches¹.

¹ Compare the language of Romans 1:11 and Acts 18:23. Apparently the word "establish" (*Greek sterizo*) had the connotation of "instruction".

Paul's Accomplished Mission

Paul believed that his vision proved that Jesus lived in heaven, that Jesus was the Messiah and God's Son, and that he would soon return. Moreover, Paul thought that the purpose of his revelation was his own appointment to preach among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16). By the time of his last extant letter, Romans, he could clearly describe his own place in God's plan. The Hebrew prophets, he wrote, had predicted that in "days to come" God would restore the tribes of Israel and that the Gentiles would then turn to worship the one true God. Paul maintained that his place in this scheme was to win the Gentiles, both Greeks and "barbarians"—the common term for non-Greeks at the time (Romans 1:14). "Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them" (Romans 11:13–14). In two other places in Romans 11—verses 25–26 ("the full number of Gentiles [will] come in" and thus "all Israel will be saved") and 30–31 ("by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy")—Paul asserts that he would save some of Israel indirectly, through jealousy, and that Jews would be brought to Christ because of the successful Gentile mission. Thus, Paul's view reversed the traditional understanding of God's plan, according to which Israel would be restored before the Gentiles were converted. Whereas Peter, James, and John, the chief apostles to the circumcised (Galatians 2:6–10), had been relatively unsuccessful, God had led Paul through Asia Minor and Greece "in triumph" and had used him to spread "the fragrance of the knowledge of [God] everywhere" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Since in Paul's view God's plan could not be frustrated, he concluded that it would work in reverse sequence—first the Gentiles, then the Jews.

Two brief stops on the way to Palestine are described at some length by Luke in Acts 20. The first was the meeting in Troas at which Paul preached. It is one of the earliest existing descriptions of Christian worship. The meeting was on the first day of the week, in the evening. The disciples gathered to break bread together, presumably the love-feast, or *Agape*, which culminated in the Lord's Supper, described in I Corinthians 11:17–26. Preaching or discourse was part of the service. In this case Paul preached and taught through the night because he was leaving on the next day and might not return.

The second stop was at Miletus, a sizable port on the west coast of Asia. Paul had taken a fast ship that bypassed Ephesus, in order that he might reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. When the ship touched at Miletus, he summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus in order to give them—a farewell message. Luke used the speech to epitomize Paul's missionary policies and achievements to

date. It is the utterance of a great soul who had given his life unreservedly into the hands of Christ and who had been fully directed by the Holy Spirit in his ministry. It discloses his own consciousness that trouble awaited him at Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23) and that his work in Asia was ended (20:25), for he contemplated going farther west on his next trip. Perhaps he realized that old age was beginning to overtake him, and that there would not be time to retrace his first steps as he had done in former journeys for the purpose of confirming the believers. With an affectionate farewell he parted from them (20:36-38).

The remainder of the voyage was uneventful, except for repeated warnings to Paul to stay away from Jerusalem (21:4, 10-11). In spite of the pleas of his friends, Paul persisted in his original plan, and the others assented reluctantly, saying, "The will of the Lord be done" (21:14).

With this visit to Jerusalem closed the most active part of Paul's missionary career. In a little less than a decade he had won the freedom of the Gentile believers from the yoke of legalism. He had built a strong chain of churches from Antioch of Syria and Tarsus of Cilicia straight across southern Asia Minor to Ephesus and Troas, and from there through Macedonia and Achaia to Illyricum. He had chosen and trained companions like Luke, Timothy, Silas, Aristarchus, Titus, and others who were well qualified to maintain the work with him or without him. He had commenced an epistolary literature that already was regarded as a standard for faith and practice. In his preaching he had laid the groundwork for future Christian theology and apologetics, and by his plans he pursued a statesmanlike campaign of missionary evangelism. His plans for a trip to Rome and Spain showed that he wanted to match the imperial commonwealth with an imperial faith. Notwithstanding his bitter and active enemies, he had established the Gentile church on a firm foundation and had already formulated the essence of Christian theology as the Spirit of God revealed to him.

Letters of Paul to the Corinthians 1 and 2

**Research work and study
by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.**



Ancient Corinth

Foreword by the Superintendent

Corinth is the name of an ancient Greek polis (city-state) and nearby isthmus that lent its name to a set of Pan-Hellenic games, a war, and a style of architecture. In works attributed to Homer, you may find Corinth referred to as Ephyre. Corinth in the middle of Greece that it is called 'isthmus' means it is a neck of land, but the Isthmus of Corinth serves as more of an Hellenic waist separating the upper, mainland part of Greece and the lower Peloponnesian parts. The city of Corinth was a rich, important, cosmopolitan, commercial area, having one harbour that allowed trade with Asia, and another that led to Italy. From the 6th century B.C., the Diolkos, a paved route up to six meters wide designed for fast passage, led from the Gulf of Corinth on the west to the Saronic Gulf on the east.

Corinth in the mythology, Sisyphus, a grandfather of Bellerophon -- the Greek hero who rode Pegasus the winged horse -- founded Corinth. [This may be a story invented by Eumelos (fl. 760 B.C.), a poet of the Bacchiadae family.] This makes the city not one of the Dorian cities -- like those in the Peloponnese -- founded by the Heracleidae, but Aiolian (Aeolian). The Corinthians, however, claimed descent from Aletes, who was a descendant of Hercules from the Dorian invasion. Pausanias explains that at the time when the Heracleidae invaded the Peloponnese, Corinth was ruled by descendants of Sisyphus named Doeidas and Hyanthidas, who abdicated in favour of Aletes whose family kept the throne for five generations until the first of the Bacchiads, Bacchis., gained control.

Archaeological finds show that Corinth was inhabited in the neolithic and early Helladic periods. Australian classicist and archaeologist Thomas James Dunbabin (1911-1955) says the nu-theta (nth) in the name Corinth shows it is a pre-Greek name. The oldest preserved building survives from the 6th century B.C. It is a temple, probably to Apollo. The earliest ruler's name is Bakkhis, who may have ruled in the ninth century. Cypselus overthrew Bakkhis' successors, the Bacchiads, c.657 B.C., after which Periander became tyrant. He is credited with having created the Diolkos. In c. 585, an oligarchical council of 80 replaced the last tyrant. Corinth colonized Syracuse and Corcyra at about the same time it got rid of its kings.

" And the Bacchiadae, a rich and numerous and illustrious family, became tyrants of Corinth, and held their empire for nearly two hundred years, and without disturbance reaped the fruits of the commerce; and when Cypselus overthrew these, he himself became tyrant, and his house endured for three generations...."

Pausanias gives another account of this early, confusing, legendary period of Corinthian history:

" [2.4.4] Aletes himself and his descendants reigned for five generations to Bacchis, the son of Prumnis, and, named after him, the Bacchidae reigned for five more generations to Telestes, the son of Aristodemus. Telestes was killed in hate by Arieus and Perantas, and there were no more kings, but Prytanes (Presidents) taken from the Bacchidae and ruling for one year, until Cypselus, the son of Eetion, became tyrant and expelled the Bacchidae.¹¹ Cypselus was a descendant of Melas, the son of Antasus. Melas from Gonussa above Sicyon joined the Dorians in the expedition against Corinth. When the god expressed disapproval Aletes at first ordered Melas to withdraw to other Greeks, but afterwards,

mistaking the oracle, he received him as a settler. Such I found to be the history of the Corinthian kings." Pausanias, op.cit.

In the middle of the sixth century, Corinth allied with Spartan, but later opposed the Spartan King Cleomenes' political interventions in Athens. It was aggressive actions of Corinth against Megara that led to the Peloponnesian War. Although Athens and Corinth were at odds during this war, by the time of the Corinthian War (395 - 386 B.C.), Corinth had joined Argos, Boeotia and Athens against Sparta.

After the Greeks lost to Philip of Macedonia at Chaeronea, the Greeks signed terms Philip insisted on so he could turn his attention to Persia. They made oaths not to overthrow Philip or his successors, or one another, in exchange for local autonomy and were joined together in a federation that we today call the League of Corinth. Members of the Corinthian League were responsible for levies of troops (for use by Philip) depending on the size of the city.

Romans besieged Corinth during the second Macedonian War, but the city continued in Macedonian hands until the Romans decreed it independent and part of the Achaean confederacy after Rome defeated the Macedonians at Cynoscephalae. Rome kept a garrison in Corinth's Acrocorinth -- the city's high spot and citadel.

Corinth failed to treat Rome with the respect it demanded. Strabo describes how Corinth provoked Rome:

"The Corinthians, when they were subject to Philip, not only sided with him in his quarrel with the Romans, but individually behaved so contemptuously towards the Romans that certain persons ventured to pour down filth upon the Roman ambassadors when passing by their house. For this and other offences, however, they soon paid the penalty, for a considerable army was sent thither...."

Roman consul Lucius Mummius destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C., looting it, killing the men, selling the children and women, and burning what remained.

"[2.1.2] Corinth is no longer inhabited by any of the old Corinthians, but by colonists sent out by the Romans. This change is due to the Achaean League. The Corinthians, being members of it, joined in the war against the Romans, which Critolaus, when appointed general of the Achaeans, brought about by persuading to revolt both the Achaeans and the majority of the Greeks outside the Peloponnesus. When the Romans won the war, they carried out a general disarmament of the Greeks and dismantled the

walls of such cities as were fortified. Corinth was laid waste by Mummius, who at that time commanded the Romans in the field, and it is said that it was afterwards refounded by Caesar, who was the author of the present constitution of Rome. Carthage, too, they say, was refounded in his reign." Pausanias; *op. cit.*

By the time of the New Testament's the apostle Paul (author of *Corinthians*), Corinth was a booming Roman town, having been made a colony by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. -- *Colonia Iulia Corinthiensis*. Rome rebuilt the city in Roman fashion, and settled it, mostly with freedmen, who grew prosperous within two generations. In the early 70s A.D., Emperor Vespasian established a second Roman colony at Corinth -- *Colonia Iulia Flavia Augusta Corinthiensis*. It had an amphitheatre, a circus, and other characteristic buildings and monuments. After the Roman conquest, the official language of Corinth was Latin until the time of Emperor Hadrian, when it became Greek. Located by the Isthmus, Corinth was responsible for the Isthmian Games, second in importance to the Olympics and held every two years in the spring.

What does spiritual freedom mean to a new Christian? When everyone around is caught up in immorality, and one is bombarded with constant temptation, how is one standing for righteousness? The fledgling church in Corinth was floundering with these questions, as the believers struggled to sort out their new found faith while living in a city overtaken with corruption and idolatry.

The Apostle Paul had planted the church in Corinth, and now, just a few years later, he was receiving questioning letters and reports of problems. The church was troubled with division, lawsuits between believers, sexual sins, disorderly worship, and overall spiritual immaturity. Paul wrote this uncompromising letter to confront and correct these Christians, answer their questions, and instruct them in several areas. He warned them not to be conformed to the world around them, but rather, to live as godly examples, reflecting Christ likeness in the midst of an immoral ancient Greek society of the time.

The young Corinthian church was located in the midst of a large, decadent seaport--a city deeply immersed in pagan idolatry and immorality, quite normal to the Greek culture of the time. The believers were primarily Gentiles converted by Paul on his second missionary journey. In Paul's absence the church had fallen into serious problems of disunity, sexual immorality, confusion over church discipline and other matters involving worship and holy living.

The Corinthian church was divided over leadership. Some followed the teachings of Paul, others favoured the words of Cephas, and some preferred

what Apollos had to say. Intellectual pride, Paul pointed out, was firmly at the centre of this spirit of division. In his letter, Paul urged the Corinthians to focus on Christ and not his messengers. The church is Christ's body where God's spirit dwells. If the church family is separated by disunity, then it ceases to work together and grow in love with Jesus Christ as the head.

The Corinthian believers were also divided on certain practices not expressly forbidden in Scripture, such as eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Self-centeredness was the root of this division. In such matters, Paul stressed spiritual freedom, although not at the expense of other believers whose faith might be fragile. If we have freedom in an area that another Christian might consider sinful behaviour, we are to be sensitive and considerate, sacrificing our freedom out of love for our weaker brothers and sisters.

The Corinthian church had lost its appreciation for the holiness of God which is our standard for holy living. In doing so, the church could no longer effectively minister to one another or be a witness to unbelievers outside the church.

By ignoring blatant sin among its members, the Corinthian church was further contributing to division and weakness in the body. Paul gave practical instructions for how to deal with immorality in the church.

An overarching theme in the book of 1 Corinthians is the need for true Christian love--love that will settle lawsuits and conflicts between brothers. A lack of genuine love was clearly an undercurrent in the Corinthian church, creating disorder in worship and the misuse of spiritual gifts. Paul spent a great deal of time describing the proper role of spiritual gifts and dedicated an entire chapter--1 Corinthians 13--to the definition of love.

The believers in Corinth were divided because of misunderstandings over the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of his followers. Paul wrote to clear confusion on this crucial matter which is so important to living out our faith in light of eternity.

Second Corinthians is a deeply personal and arousing letter--a response to the complex history between the Apostle Paul and the church he had established in Corinth. The circumstances behind this letter reveal the difficult, often painful realities of life in the ministry. More than any of his letters, this one shows us the heart of Paul as a pastor.

This letter is actually Paul's fourth letter to the church in Corinth. Paul mentions his first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9. His second letter is the book of 1 Corinthians. Three times in 2 Corinthians Paul references a third and painful

letter: "For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears ..." (2 Corinthians 2:4, ESV). And finally, we have Paul's fourth letter, the book of 2 Corinthians.

As we learned in 1 Corinthians, the church in Corinth was weak, struggling with division and spiritual immaturity. Paul's authority had been undermined by an opposing teacher who was misleading and dividing with false teachings.

In an attempt to solve the turmoil, Paul travelled to Corinth, but the distressing visit only fuelled the church's resistance. When Paul returned to Ephesus he wrote again to the church, pleading with them to repent and avoid God's judgement. Later Paul received good news through Titus that many in Corinthian had indeed repented, but a small and fractious group continued to cause problems there.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul laid out his defence, refuting and condemning the false teachers. He also encouraged the faithful to stay committed to the truth and reaffirmed his deep love for them.

The book of 2 Corinthians is quite relevant today, especially for those who feel called to Christian ministry. The first half of the book details the duties and privileges of a leader. The epistle is also a tremendous source of hope and encouragement for anyone suffering through trials.

Paul was no stranger to suffering. He had endured much opposition, persecution, and even a physical "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Through painful experiences, Paul had learned how to comfort others. And so it is for anyone who wishes to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Immorality in the church needs to be dealt with wisely and appropriately. The church's role is too important to allow sin and false teachings to go unchecked. The goal of church discipline is not to punish, but to correct and restore. Love must be the guiding force.

By keeping our eyes on the glories of heaven, we can endure our present sufferings. In the end we overcome this world. Also, Paul encouraged continued generosity among the members of the Corinthian church as a means of spreading God's kingdom.

Finally, Paul wasn't trying to win a popularity contest when he confronted the false teaching in Corinth. No, he knew that integrity of doctrine was vital to the health of the church. His sincere love for the believers is what drove him to defend his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

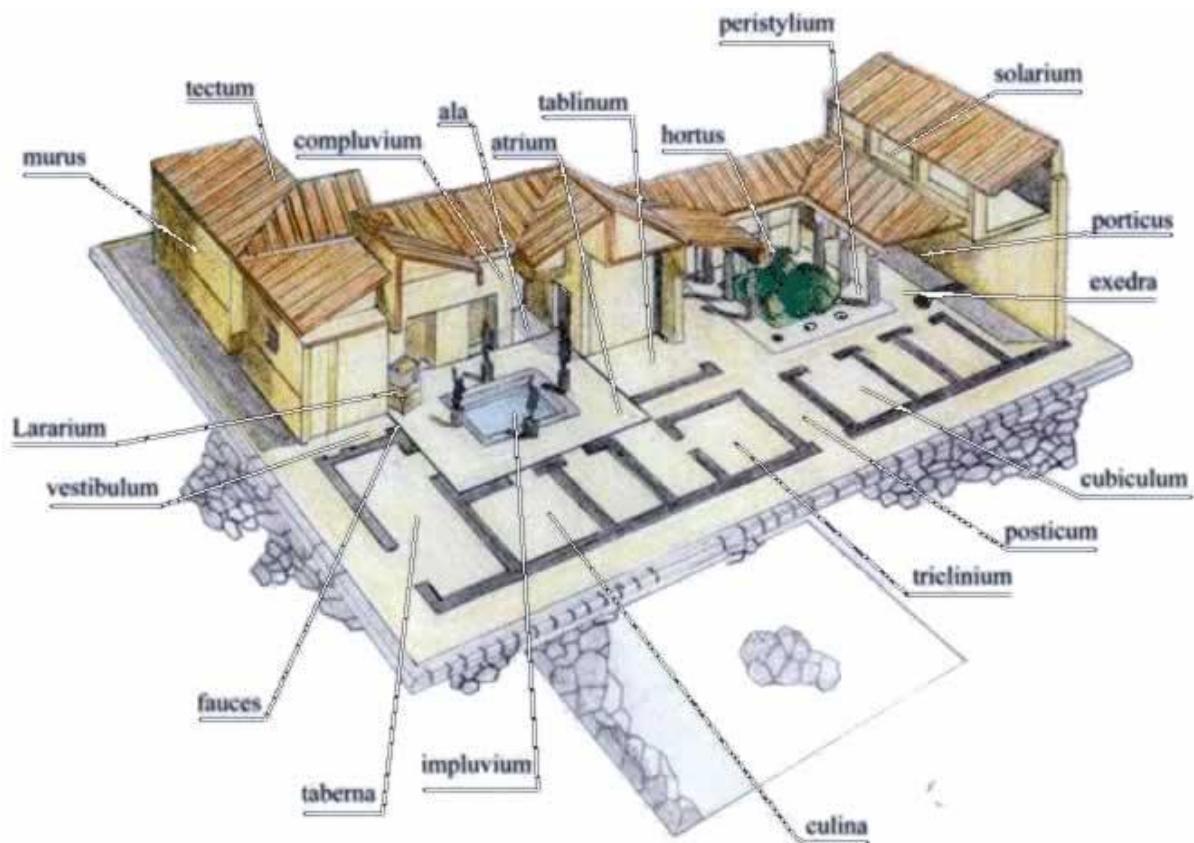
Whether in first or second Corinthians, they needed to be rebuked for their disloyalty to God's servant and God's truth. The money for the poor saints in Jerusalem needed to be collected. So Paul decided to write a letter and send it with Titus. And this letter was a strong rebuke. He wrote it probably in the summer of 54. This letter is lost. Commentators call it "The Severe Letter." We don't have it.

There was even a letter before that we don't have...the very first letter he wrote, referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 in which he rebuked them for their immorality. So you have letter number one, sometime after he left, probably soon after he left. First Corinthians doesn't come till three years later. Soon after he left came the letter on immorality which we don't have, we have a reference to it. Then came 1 Corinthians, then came a second lost letter, rebuking them again. Titus took that. He came back, gave the report in chapter 7. And here came the last letter.

Some people are still sympathetic to the false apostles. Some are still victims of sin. And it's out of this mixed emotion, gratitude for those who have responded and concern for those who haven't that he writes this letter. And he says the common greeting, which needs no comment, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is God's favour. Peace is one of its benefits. And he wishes them God's grace and God's peace.

To conclude, no matter how hard the work of a messenger of Christ might be, no matter how trying and troublesome the fellowship of the church might be, no matter how weak and sinful the people might be, no matter how much turmoil and distress comes and goes, we are called to be faithful and to give all we have in the service of Christ. That's what you're going to see in this letter from the heart...remembering that our God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has given us the richness of the promise that the work we do is His, the people we serve are His, the strength we need is His and the glory in the end belongs to Him.

Rev. Ph. L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.



An example of a large “Domus Ecclesiae (House church)
More about a “Domus Ecclesiae” at Capharnaum



Apostle Peter at Capharnaum and Domus Ecclesiae (House church)

The Fourth Century Domus Ecclesia

In the late fourth century AD one special room(1) of St. Peter House, measuring 5.80 by 6.45 m., became a Domus Ecclesia, i.e. was used for religious gatherings.

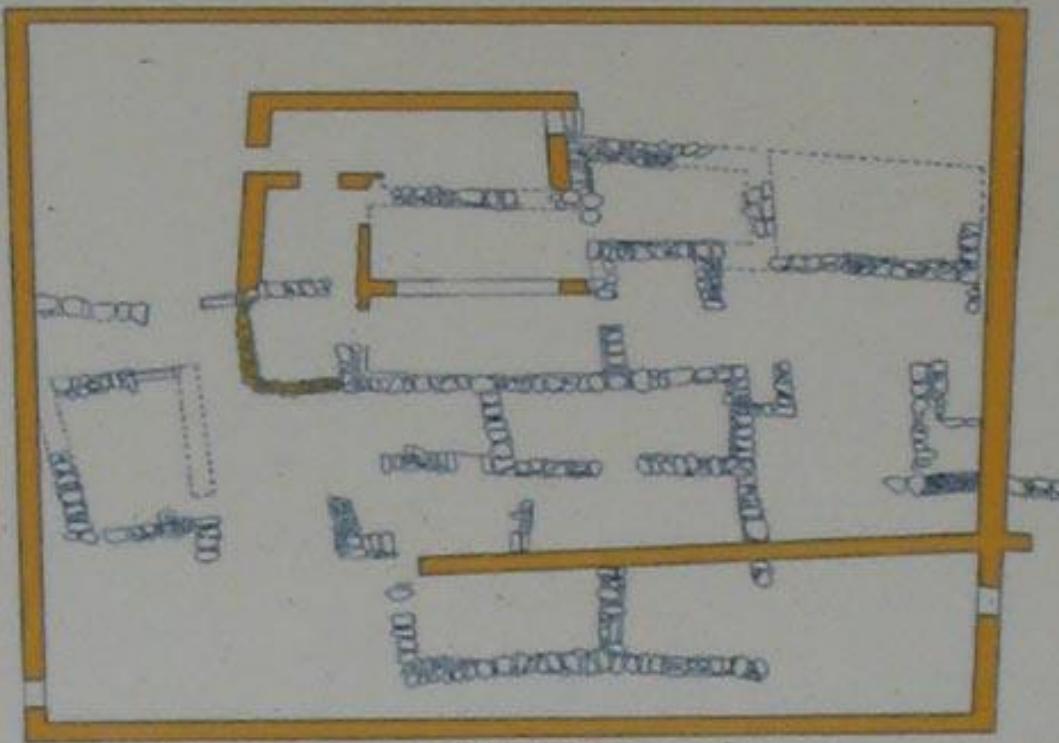
In the fourth century the traditional House of Peter was set apart from the rest of the town through the construction of an enclosure wall encompassing a perimeter of 112.55 m.

The venerated hall became a tripartite structure through the construction of a central arch and the addition of an eastern atrium.

A polichrome pavement replaced the white plastered floors of the first century AD while the inner walls received additional coatings of painted plaster. The Christians pilgrims left many inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic, Syriac and Latin.

This Domus Ecclesia is referred to by Eteria in the late fourth century when she writes: "The house of the prince of the Apostles (i.e.Peter) was changed into a church. The walls, however, (of that house) are still standing as they were (originally)".

The Fourth Century Domus Ecclesia



Sex in the Ancient World, Greece and Rome

Since the dawn of history every civilisation had prescribed severe laws against at least some kinds of sexual immorality. The oldest surviving legal codes (c 2100 -1700 BCE), draw up by the kings of Babylon, made adultery punishable by death, and most other near eastern and classical cultures also treated it as a serious offence: this was the view taken by the Assyrians, the ancient Egyptians, the Jews, the Greeks, and, to some extent, the Romans. The main concern of such laws was usually to uphold the honour and property right of fathers, husbands, and higher-status groups. The same outlook underpinned the justice of the Germanic tribes that settled across western Europe and the British Isles in the final years of the roman empire... Thus the earliest English law codes, which date from this time, evoke a society where women were bought and sold, and lived constantly under the guardianship of men. (*Faramerz Dabhoiwala – Oxford*²)

In Ancient Greece, boys were considered sexually desirable from the start of puberty until late adolescence, but stopped being so at the appearance of the beard and pubic hair. Athenians considered love affairs between adult and adolescent males as natural and honourable, on condition that sexual etiquette was respected. The term used to describe the sexual pursuit of adolescent males by adult males was “paederastia”. In stark contrast to modern attitudes towards sex between teachers and students, paederastia was usually conceptualized as a pedagogic and erotic mentoring relationship between an adult male, the “erastes” (lover), and a young, passive “pais” (boy), called the “eromenos” (beloved), usually between 12 and 17-20 years old... Often presented as a normal part of the education of a young man, paederastia institutionalised a relationship in which the mentor instructed the boy in philosophical matters and general knowledge, and prepared him for his citizenship role. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*³)

² Dr Faramerz Dabhoiwala, BA, MA, D.Phil. Quondam Fellow since 1998, Fellow and Tutor, Exeter College, Oxford, University Lecturer in Modern History.

³ Véronique Mottier: University Post: Professor in Sociology (part-time, University of Lausanne) Faculty/Department: Politics, Psychology, Sociology and International Studies (PPSIS), College Offices Currently Held: Fellow. Degrees Obtained: Certificat d'Etudes Françaises Modernes, Faculté des Lettres, University of Geneva BA & MA in Political Science, University of Geneva BA in Sociology, University of Geneva, PhD in Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge.

Relationships between men were socially acceptable, common, and widely reflected in the literature, art, and philosophy of the time. Attitudes to male-to-male sex were not homogeneous, however, and disputes on whether desire for young men or for women was superior abounded. Some argued that love for men was superior to that for women, since love between equals was preferable to that for inferior creatures. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

Certainly, for most Graeco-Romans, the idea of classifying people according to the gender of the person they have sex with would have seemed downright bizarre. Antiquity was not a culture of sexual libertarianism. Sexual morality was highly regulated by moral and legal rules. However, moral preoccupations centred on sexual practices, not on the subject of desire. The ancients did not make sense of themselves in terms of sexual identities, whereas the policing of gender identity was of central importance to them, as we shall see. Consider the contrast with the ways in which modern subjects make sense of their sexual experiences. Categories such as heterosexual and homosexual are a central source upon which we draw in order to make sense of their own sexuality. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

Seduction of a free Athenian woman was a crime which was generally deemed more serious than rape, because a secret liaison meant that a man could not be sure of the lineage of his children, whereas in the case of rape any offspring could be identified and killed. Rape was thus primarily seen as a crime against the husband, father, or male guardian of the woman rather than against herself, and as a threat to public order due to the risk of revenge from the aggrieved male party. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

No convincing evidence exists of temple prostitution in ancient Greece or Rome, in contrast to the ancient Near East, where the practice of sacred slave-prostitutes serving visitors was widespread; but prostitutes did have their own religious festivals in Rome, and more generally attended religious festivals either as worshippers or to work the crowds. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

It is important to remember that Rome and Athens did not form a single homogeneous ,unitary culture. Whereas Roman sexual ethics were quite similar to those of classical Greece, the most marked difference was that sodomy was

much more problematic within Roman culture, and pederastic relationships (and their supposed educational advantages) were not generally idealised. Relations with free-born men and boys were legally prohibited in roman morality laws such as the Lex Iulia, though it was legal for a free man to have sex with male prostitutes, slaves or foreign young men (as long as he performed the active role) or to frequent brothels. Such laws were periodically re-enacted in the Empire to demonstrate the respective emperors' concern for public morality; however, they were rarely enforced. Reflecting Greek cultural influence, revered Roman poets such as Catullus, Ovid, Horace and Virgil wrote of love affairs between men, and one of Tibullus' poems described his heartbreak at having been left for a woman by his young male lover Marathus. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

In the Mosaic law there was no rejection of polygamy, and it was practised occasionally by Jews into New Testament times and by some early Christians; but Christians have long rejected this. (*William Montgomery Watt – Professor Edinburgh⁴*)

Christianity and sex

Thought Jesus is not recorded as having said much on the subject, he evidently did not condone adultery or promiscuity, and the later leaders of his religion developed in increasingly restrictive doctrines of sexual morality. In doing so, they drew upon many earlier teachings, so that the outcome was, as one scholar puts it, “a complex assemblage of pagan and Jewish purity regulations, linked with primitive beliefs about the relationship between sex and the holy , joined to Stoic teachings about sexual ethics, and bound together by a patchwork of (new) doctrinal theories”.

Jewish law had been fairly tolerant of fornication between unmarried men and women, of men using Gentile prostitutes, and of concubines – indeed, as the Bible recorded, the ancient Hebrews had often had multiple wives.

⁴ *William Montgomery Watt (1909-) Professor (Emeritus) of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Professor William Montgomery Watt, has gifted to the Library part of his notable collection printed books on Islam. Educated at the Universities of Edinburgh, Jena, and at Balliol College, Oxford, he held the post of Assistant Lecturer in Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1934 to 1938, Lecturer in Ancient Philosophy 1946-1947, and successively Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Reader in Arabic 1947-1964. In 1964 he accepted the Chair from which he retired in 1979.*

After the above research work about homosexuality, I finally get why the Bible is apparently anti-gay. The real obsession of the Hebrew Scriptures isn't about what people do in bed; that's a more modern fixation. What the Scriptures are really concerned with is [producing] children... the people of ancient Israel were obsessed with their own survival. (*Giles Fraser – Church of England priest, Oxford*)

Christian ideals promoted virginity and sexual abstinence for men as well as women. ... sexual desire came to be blamed for binding humans to their worldly obligations to spouse or children. It prevented them from concentrating on spirituality in furtherance of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and preparation for the afterlife. Christina hostility towards sex reflects this wider religious project of freeing humans from their worldly ties and desires. Celibacy and purity came to be valorised, whereas sex and desire became policed. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

The taint of sin was thought to pollute humans from the moment of birth. As John Calvin, the Swiss Reformer put it, a newborn baby is “a seedbed of sin and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God”.

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11-12) [*contrast – italics added*]
“Anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt 19:9)

“This is what the Lord Almighty says ... ‘Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’” (1 Samuel 15:3)

“In the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.” (Romans 1:27)

At the time the author was writing the course “Berea Pastoral Psychology”, he also studies the practice of permanent sexual renunciation – continence, celibacy, life-long virginity as opposed to observance of temporary periods of sexual abstinence – that developed among men and women in Christian circles

in the period from a little before the missionary journeys of Saint Paul, in the 40s and 50s AD, to a little after the death of Saint Augustine, in 430 AD.

His principal concern has been to make clear the notions of the human person and of society implied in such renunciations, and to follow in detail the reflection and controversy which these notions generated, among Christian writers, on such topics as the nature of sexuality, the relation of men and women, and the structure and meaning of society.

To be frank: the author frequently observed during his ministry between 1974 and 2010 that the sharp and dangerous flavour of many Christian notions of sexual renunciation, both in their person and their social consequences, have been rendered tame and insipid, through being explained away as no more than inert borrowings from a supposed pagan or Jewish “background”. But an effort to do justice to the particularity of certain strains of Christian thought and practice should not be held to justify the systematic dismissal of the complex and resilient ecology of moral notions that characterised the Mediterranean culture of the age; still less should it encourage us to ignore the profound changes in the structure of ancient society in this period.

The very matter-of-fact manner in which monastic sources report bloody, botched attempts at self-castration by desperate monks shocks us by its lack of surprise. Sexual intercourse is a universal human practice. Yet sex also has a history. How we think about it, what meanings we invest in it, how we treat it as a society – all these things differ greatly across time and place. For most of western history the public punishment of men and women [who had a child outside of marriage] was a normal event. Sometimes they were treated more harshly, sometimes less, but all sex outside marriage was illegal, and the church, the state, and ordinary people devoted huge efforts to suppressing and punishing it. It seemed obvious that illicit relations angered God, prevented salvation, damaged personal relations, and undermined social order. Nobody seriously disagreed with this, even if men and women regularly gave way to temptation and have to be flogged, imprisoned, fined and shamed, in order to remind them. Though the details varied from place to place, every European society promoted the ideal of sexual discipline and punished people for consensual non-marital sex. So did their colonial off-shoots, in North America and elsewhere. This was a central feature of Christian civilisation, one that had steadily grown importance since the early middle ages. In Britain alone by the early seventeenth century, thousands of men and women suffered the consequences every year. Sometimes, as we shall see, they were even put to death. Nowadays we regard such practices with repugnance. We associate them with the Taliban, with Sharia law, with people far away and alien in outlook. Yet until quite recently,

until the Enlightenment, our own culture was like this too. This was one of the main differences between the pre-modern and the modern world. The emergence of modern attitudes to sex in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries therefore constituted a great revolution.

Jewish law had been fairly tolerant of fornication between unmarried men and women, of men using Gentile prostitutes, and of concubines – indeed, as the Bible recorded, the ancient Hebrews had often had multiple wives. In its earliest centuries, Christianity too seems to have tolerated concubinage. More generally, however, the leaders of the new religion interpreted God's commands as forbidding any sex at all outside marriage: that way lay hell-fire and damnation. Many of them were so repelled by sexual relations that they saw even marriage as a less pure and desirable state than complete celibacy. Already in Christianity's earliest surviving texts this message is spelled out by St Paul, the dominant figure of the early church. "it is good for a man not to touch a woman", he explained to the Christian community at Corinth around the middle of the first century... In the centuries that followed, the leading authorities of the church (most of whom were themselves celibate men) developed further this essentially negative view of sex.

The middle ages saw a considerable acceleration in the theory and practice of sexual discipline. Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, the western church greatly expanded its power in this sphere, in line with its growing social and intellectual dominance. That adulterers ought to be put to death was the ideal of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, and other leading reformers.

The argument of this book has been that the origin of modern western attitudes to sex lies in the great intellectual and social revolutions of the eighteenth century. For well over a thousand years, from the early middle ages to the seventeenth century, the enforcement of ever-stricter public discipline over sexual behaviour was a central preoccupation of every Christian community across the globe – yet by 1800 this had been replaced by a fundamentally different outlook. ... In place of a relatively coherent, authoritative world view that had endured for centuries, the Enlightenment left a much greater confusion and plurality of moral perspectives, with irresolvable tensions between them. That has been part of our modern condition ever since. It was not until 1991 that English law formally recognised the concept of rape within marriage.

Until the 1830s Englishmen were regularly executed for "buggery": between 1810 and 1835, forty-six men were judicially killed for this crime. Thousands more were publicly humiliated in the pillory, or sentenced to jail for their unnatural perversions. Oscar Wilde's imprisonment at hard labour for two years

in 1895 is only the best-known example. Even more remarkable than this Victorian severity is that, in numerical terms at least, it was vastly outstripped by the huge twentieth-century increase in legal persecution of homosexual behaviour. At the time of Wilde's trial, such incidents amounted to about 5 per cent of all trials for crimes against a person; by the later 1950s, the figure had increased to over 20 per cent – in other words, thousands of persecutions a year. The same dramatic surge took place in other European countries and across the United States. To curb homosexuality, perhaps even to exterminate it, was for many decades a prominent concern of public policy.

How old is the universe? Well, science painstakingly reckons it's about 14 billion years, give or take the odd billion. Not so, says religious authority: it is 6000 years old. Where did you get that from? The Bible! What evidence? The Bible! I see: on what grounds do you trust the Bible? Because the Bible tells me so! I had long since grown tired of that kind of circularity. ... I don't mind you sticking to a 3000 year old myth of creation that says God made the universe in six days. It's eccentric, but I can live with it unless you try to impose your eccentricity on everyone else. But where women and gays are concerned it is not just an eccentric opinion, it is an active injustice ... Your opinion has solid consequences for the lives of men and women, some of them terrifying. (*Richard Holloway – Professor Gresham, formerly Bishop of Edinburgh*)⁵

The canonical Gospels do not comment on Jesus's marital status. The norm for 1st-century rabbis was to marry well before 30. New Testament sources are familiar with husband-wife teams, like Priscilla and Aquila in the letters of Paul, among the earliest missionaries. The New Testament also states that bishops should be married. According to 1 Timothy, an indication that a man is ready to take on a leadership role is his ability to discipline his children with wisdom and without anger. So from a historical perspective, it is really

⁵ Richard Holloway, was Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. A former Gresham Professor of Divinity and Chairman of the Joint Board of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, he is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He has written for many newspapers in Britain, including The Times, Guardian, Observer, Herald and the Scotsman. He is the author of over twenty other books, including, Between The Monster And The Saint. His latest book is Leaving Alexandria: A Memoir of Faith and Doubt. Holloway has presented many series for BBC television and radio.

the idea that Jesus might not have been married that might surprise us. (Kate Cooper – Professor Manchester⁶)

I would love it if every clergyperson would stand up and say to their congregations: “Sometimes the Bible is misunderstood.” There is a taken-for-grantedness in conservative Christian culture worldwide—and it’s true, I think, in much of mainline Christianity today as well—that understanding the Bible is simple. And, if the Bible says something is wrong, then that pretty much settles it. There are very few Christians who are willing to stand up and say, “Sometimes the Bible is not quite clear.” Yet, I think that’s really important for Christians to say occasionally... what they think about some passages of the Bible.

Obvious examples are passages in the Bible that say slavery is OK. And, there are some passages in the Bible that absolutely prohibit divorce. In Mark 10:9, it’s complete. Matthew has an exception clause: except for reasons of adultery. Then, there are clearly passages in the New Testament that expect Jesus to come again very soon from their point in time. Now, 2,000 years have passed. There are so many more examples where in plain terms we need to say, “Sometimes the Bible is misunderstood at will.”

If the established churches do not change, it is better to promote at large Home Churches (*Domus Ecclesiae*)... something I wish every Christian should know, and I say this as a deeply committed Christian myself: sometimes the Bible is wrong because willingly misunderstood. It not only tells us about the wisdom and insights and experiences of our spiritual ancestors, but also contains their limited vision, their acceptance of things like slavery and the subordination of women. That’s not uniform, of course. There are also texts that proclaim the equality of men and women and forbid a Christian from having a Christian slave and so forth, but it’s all there, including mistaken notions about how the second coming will be soon. We would escape a whole bunch of problems if only we all knew that and weren’t alarmed by it. The whole Genesis versus evolution controversy. For me, it’s not that the first chapters of Genesis are wrong, but they’re not meant to be taken literally. So, also the issue of whether women are supposed to be subordinate to men. That issue disappears if people are willing to say, “sometimes the Bible is wrong.” So also with the texts that are quoted in opposition to same-sex behaviour. Those passages, and there

⁶ Kate Cooper is Professor of Ancient History in the University of Manchester. She writes and teaches about the world of the Mediterranean in the Roman period, with a special interest in daily life and the family, religion and gender, social identity, and the fall of the Roman Empire.

aren't many, tell us what some of our spiritual ancestors thought and clearly they were wrong about that. So many conflicts in the church could be either resolved or handled in a very different way if only we didn't have this uncritical reverence for the Bible.

We rightly abandoned Christian legitimizing of slavery about 150 years ago, Christian legitimizing of sexism in the last 30 to 40 years, [and the] Christian legitimizing of heterosexism more recently. Modern Christians are now trying to heal the wounds of the past through spreading anti-racism, equality among genders, men and women, goodwill and mutual understanding.

The Corinthian Chronicles

Background

During Paul's stay in Ephesus he maintained relations with the churches of Achaia that he had founded on the preceding journey. The church at Corinth was a vexing problem to him because of its instability. Since it was largely composed of Gentiles who had no training in the Old Testament Scriptures, and whose religious and moral antecedents were the exact opposite of Christian principle, much teaching was required to bring them to spiritual maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The ministry of Apollos among them was helpful in many ways. He attracted many of the Corinthians by his learning and his polished presentation of truth. He was especially effective in dealing with Jews, since he knew the Old Testament well and could argue publicly in convincing fashion (Acts 18:27-28). Paul appreciated his ministry and commended him (I Cor. 16:12).

It is possible that Peter visited Corinth, although no detail is given concerning his work. Paul mentioned his name as known to the Corinthians (1:12) and implied that he also was engaged in itinerant preaching (9:5). It is scarcely probable that a certain faction in the Corinthian church would claim him as their champion had there not been some contact with him personally at that time.

The "Lost Letter"

While Apollos and possibly Cephas were visiting Corinth and preaching there, Paul was on the tour that took him back to Palestine and thence to Ephesus. During this period, or shortly after his return to Ephesus, he wrote a letter to which he alluded in I Corinthians 5:9: "I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators. . ." The moral atmosphere of Corinth was such that absolute separation from evil was necessary if the church was to survive. Evidently there had been some misunderstanding of his injunction, for in I

Corinthians he explained that he was not advocating withdrawal from the world, but that there should be separation from professing Christians who persisted in this sin.

The full content of the previous letter will never be known, since it has been lost. An ingenious hypothesis has been offered that fragments of this "lost letter" were preserved in the manuscript collection at Corinth, and that I Corinthians 6:12-20 and II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 are parts of it that were incorporated into the body of the later epistles.⁷ The hypothesis rests solely on subjective impression, and however plausible it may seem, there is no good external evidence to support it. It is certain that the problem of moral purity was of supreme importance at Corinth, as it was elsewhere throughout the Gentile world, and that it was one of the earliest issues with which Paul had to deal.

1 Corinthians

Date

The response to the first letter was quite unsatisfactory. Apollos and Cephas had moved to other fields, and the church, bereft of adequate leadership, had fallen into confusion. Disquieting rumours concerning it began to drift back to Ephesus through slaves of a Corinthian family who were in Ephesus on business. Finally three members of the church, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, brought a contribution to Paul and also a letter containing certain questions that the Corinthians wanted clarified. In response Paul wrote I Corinthians. It was composed near the end of his sojourn at Ephesus, for he had already formulated his plans for leaving Asia and for making an extended visit to Macedonia and Achaia (I Cor. 16:57). It must have been composed during the winter or in the fall, for he spoke of staying at Ephesus until Pentecost because of the success that was attending his work (16:8). He was engaged in raising the contribution for the poor in Jerusalem, which he took with him on his last journey to that city (Acts 24:17), so that he contemplated returning to Palestine again in the near future. Probably it was written in the winter of A.D. 55, during the peak of his work at Ephesus.

Content

First Corinthians is the most varied in content and style of all the epistles of Paul. The topics discussed range from schism to finance and from church decorum to the resurrection. Every literary device known to writing is employed

⁷ See David Smith, *Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), Appendix I, p. 654.

in its pages: logic, sarcasm, entreaty, scolding, poetry, narration, exposition—in short, it is written in the same style as Paul would have carried on in a conversation with the elders of Corinth had he been present with them. It is thoroughly informal in its approach rather than being a set essay on theological subjects. There is, however, a central theme. Findlay has called it "the doctrine of the cross in its social application." It reflects the conflict that took place when Christian experience and Christian ideals of conduct came into conflict with the concepts and practices of the pagan world. The problems discussed in it are by no means outdated, for they are still to be found wherever Christians come into contact with a pagan civilization.

Outline

I Corinthians: The Problems at Corinth

I. Salutation	1:1-9
II. Reply to report from “house of Chloe”	1:10-6:20
Party Strife	1:10-3:23
Defence of Paul’s Ministry	4:1-4
Criticism of Immortality	5:1-13
Criticism of Lawsuits	6:1-11
Reply to Libertinism	6:12-20
III. Reply to Questions in Letter	7:1-16:9
Marriage	7:1-24
Virgins	7:25-40
Things Sacrificed to Idols	8:1-11:1
Evaluated by the idol	8:1-13
Evaluated by freedom	9:1-27
Evaluated by relation to God	10:1-22
Evaluated by relation to others	10:23-11:1
Problems of Worship	11:2-34
The covering of the head	11:2-16
The Lord’s Table	11:17-34
Spiritual Gifts	12:1-14:40
The Resurrection of the Body	15:1-58
The Collection	16:1-9
IV. Concluding Salutations	16:10-24

The structure of I Corinthians depends on the order of topics that had been brought to Paul's attention by the visitors from Corinth and by the letter the Corinthians had written. How much news had been imparted by Apollos and by the trio who brought the contribution is not told. He made direct reference to "them that are of the household of Chloe" (1:11) who had informed him of the

parties that had grown up within the church and of the immorality and litigation that disturbed their peace. These topics he discussed at length in the first six chapters. Beginning with the seventh chapter a new phrase appears: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote . . ." (7:1), and its subsequent repetitions (7:25; 8:1; [11:2]; 12:1; [15:1]; 16:1) mark off the subdivisions of his reply to their written questions.

Evaluation

First Corinthians affords a better insight into the problems of a pioneer church than almost any other writing in the New Testament. Each problem was met by applying a spiritual principle rather than by recommending a psychological expedient. For schism, the remedy is spiritual maturity (3:1-9); for fornication, church discipline until the offender repents and is restored (5:1-5); for litigation, arbitration within the Christian community (6:1-6). In the case of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, the concern of the believer is to save the unbeliever, not to alienate him or her (7:16); for the problem of the unmarried virgins, self-control or lawful marriage (7:36-37). In the casuistic questions of food offered to idols and of details of worship, the relation of the believer to God is the deciding factor (10:31; 11:13, 32). Similarly the gifts are administered by God (12:28) within the church.

First Corinthians contains some allusions to church life and practice that are puzzling to modern Christians. The status of "virgins" in chapter 7, where the word "daughter" (7:36-38) does not occur in the original text, the "delivering unto Satan" (5:5) in church discipline, and baptism for the dead (15:29) are usages for which no explanation is given, although they were evidently well known to Paul and his readers. Their mention does not mean that they were widely practiced. Baptism for the dead, too, may have been a local custom in the Corinthian church that was not necessarily approved, but that was used by Paul as a practical point of appeal in his argument for the resurrection.

First Corinthians was dispatched to its destination by Timothy (16:10). Paul had tried to persuade Apollos to undertake the task of straightening out the church's problems, but he declined. Perhaps he thought that his presence could only increase the schismatic tendency among the followers. Paul had some misgivings concerning Timothy's effectiveness, for he urged the Corinthians not to frighten him or despise him (16:10-11).

Nothing is said concerning the outcome of Timothy's mission, but it seems to have been a failure. In II Corinthians Paul spoke twice of his plans and said, "This is the third time I am ready to come to you" (II Cor. 12:14; 13:1). Since his first visit to Corinth was the founding of the church, and since his letter was written from Macedonia after leaving Ephesus where he was waiting to come to

Corinth, there must have been an unrecorded visit somewhere between Timothy's visit and Paul's departure from Asia. Such a call need not have occupied any great length of time, for transit from Ephesus to Corinth could be made easily. Luke does not record any such trip in Acts, but neither does he record many other episodes that might have been equally interesting or important. A survey of II Corinthians will show that Paul doubtless did go to Corinth to attempt to accomplish what Timothy had not been able to do, and that while there he had been grossly insulted and his counsel had been rejected. Rival self-styled "apostles," who drew their support from the churches and who boasted of their Jewish ancestry and of their activity as ministers of Christ, had invaded Corinth and belittled Paul to the church (see II Cor. 10-11). Furthermore, the offending members of the church had been decidedly unrepentant (12:21). The situation was tense.

Paul decided that he would not return to Corinth until the church adopted a different attitude (1:23). He had hoped that he might raise some money in Achaia for the Jerusalem collection. In anticipation of carrying through the original plan of a final visit to Macedonia and Achaia, he sent Titus ahead to deal with the church, while he closed the work at Ephesus and went to Troas en route westward.

Perhaps Paul wrote once again to Corinth at this time. There has been some speculation as to whether II Corinthians represents one epistle or two. In II Corinthians 2:4 Paul spoke of a previous letter that he wrote "with many tears," and that was intended to convince the Corinthians of his love for them. I Corinthians does not seem to fit the description, and II Corinthians as it stands was written subsequently. A number of scholars have suggested that II Corinthians 10 through 13 may be a third epistle, written between I Corinthians and II Corinthians 1 through 9, which Paul wrote to defend himself and which he sent to the church by the hand of Titus (II Cor. 7:8-13).⁵ Others have contended that the intermediary severe letter was lost.⁶ As in the case of the first letter, there is no satisfactory external evidence for partitioning II Corinthians. Every manuscript of the Pauline epistles contains it as it is, so that its integrity cannot be challenged on grounds of manuscript variation. If chapters 10 through 13 do represent a third epistle, while chapters 1 through 9 represent a fourth, there is no trace of original separation in the manuscript tradition.

When Paul reached Troas after leaving Ephesus, he looked eagerly for Titus, but Titus did not appear (2:12-13). Paul, oppressed with worry over what might have happened at Corinth, went across to Macedonia, where his troubles multiplied (7:5). While he was labouring there and arranging with the Macedonian churches for their gifts to Jerusalem, Titus suddenly arrived with the good news that a revival had broken out in the Corinthian church and that

its attitude had changed from one of carelessness and obstinacy to one of repentance. With joy Paul sat down and penned II Corinthians as a preparation for a third visit that he hoped would have only happy consequences. If the whole epistle were written at this time, he included a lengthy defense of his ministry (2:14 to 7:4) and the financial request for the Corinthians and their colleagues of Achaia to match the Macedonian contributions to Jerusalem (chaps. 8-9).

2 Corinthians

Content

The content has already been discussed to some extent. The epistle differs from I Corinthians in dealing with personal matters rather than with doctrinal teaching or ecclesiastical order. The human Paul is much in evidence: his feelings, desires, dislikes, ambitions, and obligations are all spread before his readers. This epistle contains less systematic teaching and more expression of personal feeling than even I Corinthians, and its structure is not as clear-cut as is that of the former epistle.

II Corinthians: The Epistle of Paul's Ministry

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Explanation of Personal Conduct	1:3-2:13
III. The defence of the Ministry	2:14-7:4
The Nature of the Ministry	2:14-3:18
The Sincerity of the Ministry	4:1-6
The Perseverance of the Ministry	4:7-15
The Prospect of the Ministry	4:16-5:10
The Sanctions of the Ministry	5:11-19
The Example of the Ministry	5:20-6:10
The Appeal of the Ministry	6:11-7:4
IV.Comments on Effects of Letter	7:5-16
V.The Grace of Giving	8:1-9:15
VI.Personal defence	10:1-12:13
VII.Preparation for Visit	12:14-13:10
VIII.Concluding Salutation	11:11-14

Evaluation

Second Corinthians affords an insight into the career of Paul that none of the other epistles gives. It was written not only to defend him against the occasional criticisms of the Corinthian church, but also against the slanders and accusations that his enemies raised against him wherever he was preaching. The controversy that began in Galatia had created a powerful group of Judaizing opponents, who

did not scruple to use any methods, fair or foul, in order to discredit him. Not only did he have to contend with the spiritual inertia and the evils of traditional paganism, but he also had to face the active malice of jealous and prejudiced leaders who professed to be Christians.

The accusations brought by his opponents were numerous. They charged him with walking "according to the flesh" (10:2). They said that he was a coward, for he wrote letters that resounded like thunder but in actual presence he was about as authoritative as a mouse (10:10). He did not maintain himself in dignity by taking support from the churches, but demeaned himself by working (11:7). They claimed that he was not one of the original apostles, and so was not qualified to teach (11:5; 12:11-12), and that he had no credentials that he could show (3:1). They attacked his personal character by saying that he was fleshly (10:2), boastful (10:8, 15), and deceitful (12:16), and they insinuated that he embezzled the funds that were being entrusted to him (8:20-23).

The accusers themselves were apparently Jews (11:22) who were "ministers of Christ" (11:23) and who, by means of the clever use of recommendations from other churches (3:1), had obtained entrance into the Pauline churches. Doubtless they were responsible for some of the schism in Corinth. They were haughty and domineering (11:19-20), but were not ready to do pioneering work or to suffer for Christ (11:23ff.). They were, in short, "false brethren."

This picture, drawn by inference from the language of Paul, shows that the church of the apostolic age had its struggles and its sins. The marvel is not that it was imperfect; the marvel is that it survived. Only a divine dynamic could have given enduring vitality to so weak and sensual a group as the Corinthian church. The positive teaching of the epistle makes it one of the most valuable in the New Testament. Its picture of the ministry, its statement of the prospects beyond death (chap. 5), and its teaching on giving (chaps. 8-9) are all outstanding passages.

The Last Visit to Corinth

The arrival of Titus in Macedonia with the reassuring word of a change in the attitude of the Corinthian church (II Cor. 7:6-16) enabled Paul to pursue his journey without fear. Luke simply says that he spent three months in Achaia, but gives no details. In the spring of A.D. 56 he made plans to return to Jerusalem with the offering, when he learned that a plot against his life had been hatched by his Jewish enemies (Acts 20:3). Realizing that they would easily do away with him on shipboard, he dispatched his companions to Troas, while he, in company with Luke, went north to Philippi by the land route, and then sailed for Troas just after the close of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which came immediately after the Passover. The way in which the "we" section reappears at

this point in Acts (20:5-6) indicates that Luke had been traveling with Paul in Achaia. It is suggested following an ancient tradition, that perhaps Luke is identical with "the broacher whose praise in the gospel is *spread* through all the churches; and . . . who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in *the* matter of this grace" (II Cor. 8:18-19). No name is mentioned, and the anonymous person could be any one of the companions of Paul listed in Acts 20:4. On the other hand, the definite article when used with terms denoting members of a family may be translated as a possessive pronoun. If Titus and Luke were brothers, the early connection of both of them with Antioch and the silence concerning both in the book of Acts could be explained more easily. At any rate, Luke at this time was Paul's active helper in the campaign throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and he became Paul's closest associate in the years of imprisonment that followed.

The Projected Mission

Paul had planned the return to Jerusalem to be only an interlude in a larger mission. Already he had his eyes on a grander goal than any of the cities that he had evangelized previously. Rome beckoned him, for he was a citizen of the empire. If he could reach Rome with the gospel, it could easily be disseminated to all parts of the empire, for all roads led to Rome.

With true missionary statesmanship he laid out his course of action. Luke says that "after these things were ended [the ministry at Ephesus], Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21).

The Non-Canonical Third Letter to the Corinthians⁸

(For information only)

The letter traditionally called "3 Corinthians" is a pseudonymous reply of "Paul" to a letter from the Christians in Corinth, sent to him while he was in prison in Philippi. Both letters eventually came to be incorporated in the apocryphal Acts of Paul (see above). In some parts of the Christian church for example, in Armenia-3 Corinthians was accepted as canonical Scripture.

The letter from the Corinthians asks for Paul's advice about the teaching of two heretics, Simon (Magus?) and Cleobius, who maintain, among other things, that (a) God was not the creator, (b) the Jewish prophets were not from God, (c) Jesus did not come in the flesh, and (d) the flesh will not be raised. All of these

⁸ "Lost Scriptures" (Books that did not make it in the New Testament), by Bart D. Ehrman (Author of Lost Christianities) (Oxford University Press)

are clearly Gnostic ideas.' The pseudonymous author of 3 Corinthians replies by refuting each of them in turn. In particular, he wants to stress the proto-orthodox doctrine that the flesh was created by God and that it will be redeemed, as evident in the resurrection of Jesus himself in the flesh. The letter concludes with dire warnings of eternal torment for those who embrace the heretical teachings of Paul's opponents.

Most scholars now think that these letters were originally composed and transmitted independently of the Acts of Paul and were then at a later time incorporated in the longer narrative. If so, they may well have been in circulation already by the middle of the second century.

The Letter of the Corinthians to Paul

Stephanus and the Presbyters with him, Daphnus, Euboulus, Theophilus, and Zenon, to Paul, who is in the Lord. Greetings!

Two men, a certain Simon and Cleobius, have come to Corinth and upset the faith of some by their corrupt teachings, which you can evaluate for yourself. For we have never heard such teachings either from you or anyone else. But we have kept the things we received from you and our other teachers. And so, since the Lord has shown us mercy, come to us while you are in the flesh, or write back to us, that we may hear your teachings again. For we believe what was revealed to Theonoe, that the Lord has saved you from the hand of the Lawless one.

For this is what they are saying and teaching: that there is no need to consider the [Hebrew] prophets; that God is not the Almighty; that there is no resurrection of the flesh; that humans are not God's creation; that the Lord did not come (into the world) in the flesh; that he was not born from Mary; and that the world did not come from God but from angels.

For this reason, brother, make all haste to come, that the Corinthian church may continue to have no cause of stumbling and that the foolishness of these men may be made clean

Farewell in the Lord.

The Letter of Paul to the Corinthians Concerning the Flesh

Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ and who is in the midst of many failures, to the brothers in Corinth. Greetings!

I am not surprised that the doctrines of the evil one have moved forward so quickly; for the Lord Christ will soon come—he who is rejected by those who

have debased his sayings. For in the beginning I delivered over to you the teachings I received from the apostles who were before me, who spent their entire time with Jesus Christ: that our Lord Christ Jesus was born from Mary, from the seed of David, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven into her by the Father, that he might come into the world and set free all flesh through his flesh, and might raise us from the dead as fleshly beings, just as he showed himself as a model; and that humans were formed by his Father. For this reason they were sought out by him while they were perishing, that he might make them live through their adoption as God's children.

For God who is over all, the Almighty, the one who made heaven and earth, sent prophets to the Jews first of all, that they might be pulled away from their sins. For he wanted to save the house of Israel. And so he sent a portion of the Spirit of Christ into the prophets, who proclaimed the true worship of God for many years. For the unrighteous ruler who wanted to be God laid hands on them and delivered all human flesh to the bondage of pleasure.

But since God the Almighty was righteous, and did not wish to abandon his own creation, he sent down the Spirit through fire into Mary the Galilean, that the evil one might be defeated through that same perishing flesh that he used in his dealings with others. In this way he would convincingly be shown not to be God. For by his own body Christ Jesus saved all flesh, that he might show forth a temple of righteousness by his own body, by which we have been set free. Those others, therefore, are not children of righteousness but children of wrath; they try to restrain God's foreknowledge by saying that heaven and earth and all that is in them is not the work of the Father. They have the cursed faith of the serpent. Reject such people and flee from their teaching.

There is no resurrection for those who tell you there is no resurrection of the flesh, who deny, in fact, the one who is risen. For they do not know, O men of Corinth, about the sowing of wheat or other seed, that it is cast naked on the earth and after it disintegrates in the depths it is raised by the will of God, a body and fully clothed, so that not only is the body that is cast down raised up, but it is multiplied, erect, and blessed.

And if we are not to make a parable out of the seed, you should know that Jonah, the son of Amathias, when he refused to preach in Nineveh, was swallowed by a huge fish. After three days and nights God heard Jonah praying from the depths of Hades—and not a bit of him was corrupted, not even a hair or an eyelash. How much more will he raise you who believe in Christ Jesus, just as he himself was raised, O you of little faith!

And if a corpse was cast onto the bones of the prophet Elisha by the sons of Israel, and was then raised up in the body what about you? When the body, bones,

and spirit of Christ have been cast upon you in that last day, will you not be raised with flesh intact?

If anyone accepts some other teaching, let him not cause me trouble. For I have chains on my hands that I may gain Christ, and marks on my body that I may come to the resurrection of the dead. Anyone who remains in the rule received through the blessed prophets and the holy Gospel will receive a reward. Anyone who transgresses these things is bound for the fire, as are those atheists who have come before them—offspring of vipers, whom you should reject by the power of the Lord.

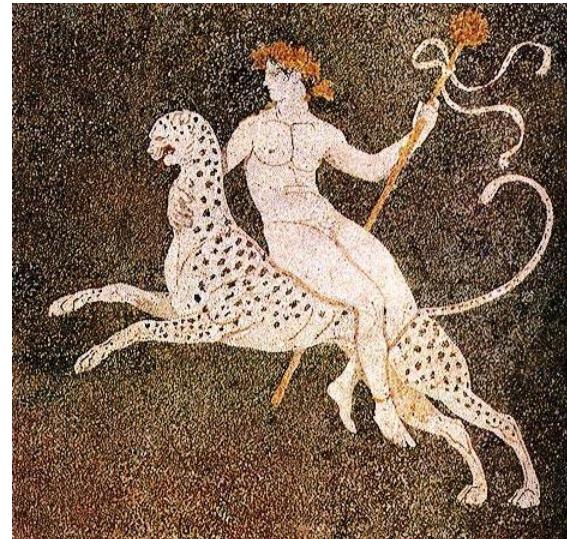
May peace be with you.



More than forty Greek-Coptic diglot manuscripts of the New Testament have survived to the present day.



*Apollo, patron of the arts, divination
and medicine*



*Mosaic of the god Dionysus,
Greek god of wine and liberation,
and centre of an important
mystery religion*

Letters to the Corinthians 1 and 2 Commented

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1: 1-31

1. Christ the basis of unity

Verses 1 – 9. The pre-eminence of Christ

Paul identified himself as having been “called” to be an apostle of Christ Jesus “through God’s will,” thus indicating that his authority as an apostle came from God as an expression of his unmerited favour. At the time, Sosthenes was with him and, therefore, he associated him with himself at the outset of the letter. The name “Sosthenes” does not appear to have been common. This may lend weight to the possibility that he is the same person as the synagogue official in Corinth

who was submitted to a beating in the presence of Gallio and thereafter became a believer. Paul called Sosthenes “the brother,” one whom the Corinthians knew. (1:1)

The community of believers in Corinth belonged to God, for he had purchased it with the blood of his beloved Son. (Compare Acts 20:28.) As God’s congregation, the members thereof were “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Through their faith in the Son of God, they came to be part of his body and were sanctified or set apart as holy to do his Father’s will. They were called to be “holy ones” or God’s cleansed people. They shared this “holy” or pure standing with all others who “called upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To call upon his name signifies to acknowledge him as Lord, acting in harmony with his example and teaching. “In every place, theirs and ours,” would be wherever communities of believers existed and acknowledged God’s Son as their Lord. (1:2)

“Ours” could refer to places where Paul had ministered, and “theirs” to locations other than those where he had served. Another possibility is that the words “theirs and ours” may mean “their Lord and ours.” Numerous translations have added “Lord” in their renderings, thereby making this meaning explicit. (1:2; see the Notes section.)

“Favour,” unmerited or unearned kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace of which God and Christ are the source would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity. Their sense of well-being and security would stem from knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and affliction. (1:3)

In view of the gracious divine favour (including the gifts that existed within the community of believers) that had been granted to them, Paul was moved always to thank God for the Corinthians. According to numerous manuscripts, the apostle said, “my God,” which would have reflected his personal relationship with him. The divine favour had been given to the Corinthian believers “in Christ Jesus,” having come into their possession because of being at one with him on the basis of their faith in him and what he accomplished through his sacrificial death. (1:4)

“In him,” or as members of his body attached to him as the head, the Corinthian believers had been enriched in every way, “in all word and all knowledge.” Their enrichment in “word” appears to refer to their ability to express the message about the Son of God. Because of having come to know all the

essentials about his example and teaching, they were also enriched in knowledge. They were fully acquainted with the glad tidings about him. (1:5)

The “testimony of Christ” had been firmly established or confirmed among the Corinthian believers. This may refer to the miracles or deeds that revealed the working of divine power, serving to verify the truthfulness of the message about the Son of God. (1:6)

Through the operation of God's spirit, various miraculous gifts had been imparted to the individual disciples of Christ. As a community of believers, the Corinthians were not lacking in any essential gifts. In keeping with what they had learned about Christ, they were waiting for his revelation or his return in glory. Approved believers would then be united with him and, in the ultimate sense, begin enjoying their status as God's children. (1:7)

Paul expressed confidence that the Father, the one to whom he continued to offer thanks for the Corinthian believers, would keep them firm or strengthen them to the end. The Father's safekeeping assured the Corinthian believers that they would be found blameless or fully approved “in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That “day” refers to his revelation or his return in glory. (1:8)

The apostle could express himself with such confidence because “God is faithful,” dependable, or trustworthy. He had called the Corinthian believers into fellowship with his Son and, therefore, would aid them to live in keeping with the purpose for which he had called them. (1:9)

Verses 10-17. The presence of factions

Addressing the Corinthians as “brothers” or fellow children of God, Paul admonished them by “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” or on the basis of the authority Christ had granted him. The apostle urged all of them to “speak the same” or to be united in their profession of faith and not to have any divisions among them. All of them should have as their aim to be of the same mind and the same thought or purpose. (1:10)

Disturbing reports about the existence of strife among his “brothers” or fellow believers in Corinth had reached Paul from persons associated with Chloe. The ones who brought the report were either servants or other members of her household. Possibly Chloe was a woman of some means and, like Lydia in Philippi, engaged in commercial business. (1:11)

Divisiveness had developed because the Corinthians identified themselves with certain ones as leaders. Individually, they would say, “I am of Paul, but I am of

Apollos, but I am of Cephas [Peter], but I am of Christ.” Whereas Paul and Apollos had been in Corinth, it is not known whether Peter ever passed through the city. If Peter did visit Corinth, this could explain why some of the Corinthians would identify themselves as belonging to him. Another possibility may be that certain believers had met Peter elsewhere and, on account of his close personal association with Jesus, chose to identify themselves with him. In view of his mentioning himself, Apollos, and Peter as examples of those who were being looked to in a manner that resulted in factions, Paul’s reference to those who said, “I am of Christ,” may also have been in a manner that contributed to quarrelling. (1:12)

Disavowing the factious spirit that resulted from looking to certain men, Paul said, “Has the Christ been divided?” The implied answer is an emphatic “no.” Many manuscript readings would allow for rendering the words as a statement (“The Christ has been divided”), which would mean that the existing factions in the community of believers or the body of Christ caused Christ to be divided, for he is the head of the body. The apostle then raised other rhetorical questions that called for a “no” answer, “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13)

He was grateful (“to God,” according to numerous manuscripts) that he had not baptized anyone other than Crispus and Gaius. As the reason for his gratitude, Paul added, “so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.” No general claim would have been justified that Corinthian believers had been immersed in the name of Paul and thereby acknowledged him as their leader to whom they came to belong. (1:14, 15)

After having mentioned Crispus and Gaius, the apostle appears to have recalled that he also baptized the household of Stephanas, but he had no recollection of having baptized anyone else. Christ’s purpose in sending him or commissioning him as an apostle had been for him to proclaim the good news. He had no special commission to do baptizing (as did John the Baptist). The fact that the apostle stressed that Jesus Christ had not sent him to do baptizing may indicate that certain ones, in an inordinate manner, looked to those who had immersed them, which action marked their entrance into the community of believers. (1:16, 17)

Verses 18-31. The corrective of the cross

Furthermore, Paul having been sent did not serve to demonstrate “wisdom of word,” which may mean the human wisdom associated with eloquent speaking and impressive reasoning. In view of the absence of the persuasive power

stemming from extraordinary speaking and reasoning ability, the death of Christ and the reason for it were revealed to the fullest extent. Thus the “cross [*staurós*] of Christ” was not emptied. The reference to the implement on which Christ died is representative of all that he accomplished through his sacrificial death, and nothing in Paul’s ministry diminished the power that this historical event had on all who responded to it in faith. (1:17)

To those who were perishing because of their persisting in unbelief, the “word of the cross” (the message about Jesus’ death and its significance) appeared to be foolishness. They could not comprehend how there could be any benefit resulting to them from one who died an ignominious death like that of a vile criminal. For those who responded in faith and thus were saved or delivered from God’s condemnation of the world of mankind that remained in a state of alienation from and enmity with him, the “word of the cross” proved to be God’s power. The message regarding Jesus’ death and what it accomplished has a powerful effect on all who embrace it, revealing to them both the seriousness of sin and the depth of God’s love for humans in a way that no other arrangement could have achieved. The nature of Jesus’ death exposed the seriousness of sin. As God’s provision for humans to be forgiven of their sins and to be reconciled to him as his approved children, Jesus’ death demonstrated the greatness of divine love. (1:18)

Paul appropriated the words of Isaiah 29:14 (LXX) to show that evaluation of God’s activity or purpose on the basis of human wisdom would lead to the wrong conclusion, which would explain why the unbelievers would consider the “word of the cross” to be foolish. “For it is written,” said the apostle, “I [YHWH] will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent ones.” (1:19)

Paul then raised a number of rhetorical questions. “Where [is the] wise one? Where [is the] scribe? Where [is the] debater of this age?” When referring to the “wise one,” Paul may have thought of the Greeks, with their pride in philosophy (“love of wisdom”). Possibly he particularly meant the Jewish scribes when mentioning the “scribe.” The “debater” could include any lover of disputes among both Jews and Greeks. In view of the absence of punctuation in the original Greek text, the phrase, “of this age,” could also modify “wise one” and “scribe,” not necessarily being restricted to “debater.” The expression “this age” may be understood to mean the then-existing Greco-Roman world. In relation to what God had accomplished through his Son, there was no one among the world’s wise ones, scribes, or debaters who could comprehend the divine arrangement for forgiveness of sins or come to any sound conclusion regarding it. Appropriately, in view of the ignorant state in which God had left them, Paul

raised the rhetorical question, “Did not God make the wisdom of the world foolish?” (1:20)

Through the “wisdom” existing in the world of mankind alienated from God, no one could come to know him. In his wisdom, he had purposed that this would be the case. Therefore, he was well-pleased to save from condemnation those who would believe, doing so through the “foolishness” (from the world’s standpoint) of the proclamation (regarding the death of his Son and what it accomplished). (1:21; see the Notes section.)

For their part, the Jews demanded “signs” as a condition for believing. On the basis of Daniel 7:13, they expected the promised Messiah to come with the clouds of heaven. For this reason, they repeatedly asked Jesus for a heavenly “sign.” The Greeks desired “wisdom,” wanting proofs that were set forth with eloquent and impressive reasoning. (1:22)

Either using the first person editorial plural or meaning to include his close associates, Paul indicated that he did not accommodate the demand for “signs” and the desire for “wisdom.” “But we preach Christ crucified.” For the Jews, this proved to be a cause for stumbling, for it did not fit their expectation of a conquering Messiah who would liberate them from the Roman yoke. As for the non-Jewish people, they could not imagine that benefits could come to them through a man who was executed like the worst kind of criminal. The message about “Christ crucified” sounded foolish to them. (1:23)

To the “called ones,” both Jews and Greek (non-Jews) who responded to God’s call or invitation to be reconciled to him as his beloved children, Christ proved to be “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Christ’s sacrificial death was the means God used to effect liberation from sin and condemnation, a liberation that no human power could have brought about. Thus, by what he accomplished, Christ manifested the incomparable divine power. The arrangement for being forgiven of sin and being reconciled to God gave evidence of surpassing wisdom. It made it possible for responsive humans to recognize the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God’s love. So, in his own person and by his willing surrender of his life, Christ displayed his Father’s wisdom. No other provision for forgiveness of sins could have stirred the inmost selves of believers as intensely as the awareness that the Son of God died for them and that his Father had sent him to the world for this purpose. The transcendent love of the Son in surrendering his life and that of the Father in giving his Son for humans in a state of alienation from him cannot fully be fathomed, for nothing in the human sphere is even remotely comparable. (1:24)

Whereas the message about “Christ crucified” appears as “foolishness” to unbelieving humans, this “foolishness of God” is “wiser than men,” for humans, regardless of how wise they may be, are incapable of devising a means to free themselves from sin and its consequences. In the eyes of unbelieving humans, “Christ crucified” would be “weakness” or a “weak thing,” for they could not imagine that the greatest possible good would result there from. The “weakness of God,” however, is “stronger than men,” for humans are powerless when it comes to effecting freedom from sin. (1:25)

Within the community of “brothers” or fellow believers, the Corinthians could see that, “according to the flesh” or according to human evaluation, not many of them were wise, powerful, or of noble birth. For the most part, they were persons of much lower social standing, including slaves. (1:26)

The upper classes of society would have looked down upon them as foolish and weak, persons of little account. God, though, had chosen what is regarded as foolish in the world of mankind to shame the wise ones and what is thought of as weak to shame the strong. To accomplish his purpose, God did not need the wise and the powerful. He did not seek their support, for they were of no special value to him. As individuals who were of no use to him in their state of unbelief, he put them to shame. (1:27)

Instead of soliciting the cooperation of the wise and influential ones of the world, God chose the ignoble, the despised, or the nothings or little nobodies as his people to advance his cause. This served to reduce to nothing “the things that are,” revealing that the unbelieving somebodies were of no value to him. (1:28) As a result, “no flesh,” or no human, had any basis for boasting in the sight of God. No one had anything to offer that God specifically needed to carry out his purpose. (1:29)

It was not on the basis of any personal merit that believers had come to be “in Christ,” at one with him as members of his body. God is the one who made this possible. As Paul expressed it, “Out of him, however, you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” (1:30, 31)

In the world, the Corinthian believers had mostly been nobodies or nothings. On account of what God had done for them, they enjoyed the dignified standing of his beloved children. Christ was “wisdom from God” for them, providing them with everything they needed to conduct themselves in keeping with their new life as members of his body. On account of their faith in him, they came into

possession of his righteousness as persons forgiven of their sins and divinely approved. Through him and what he accomplished through his death, they were sanctified or set apart for his Father as holy or as his clean people. They were also redeemed, or set free from the condemnation of sin, and were awaiting the full redemption, which would be accomplished at the time of their being united to Christ in the sinless state. (1:30)

With all boasting on the basis of personal standing, achievement, or merit being ruled out, believers give credit to God and Christ for everything. Their new life is owing to them, and so they live for God and Christ. Any boasting rightly is “in the Lord.” Paul quoted the thought (not the exact words) expressed in Jeremiah 9:24, where the reference is to boasting in knowing YHWH or having a relationship with him. Accordingly, the boasting “in the Lord” could refer to boasting in the Father, the source of the life “in Christ.” It may be, though, that Paul meant the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is wisdom from God, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1:31)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 1:1, the Greek word for “called” is missing in a number of manuscripts, including fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus.

In translations that add “Lord” after “their” in 1 Corinthians 1:2, a common rendering is, “all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” (NRSV) When the expression “theirs and ours” is understood to refer to “every place,” the phrase can be translated, “all those who in every place, theirs and ours, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the basic alternate rendering found in a footnote of the *New Jerusalem Bible* and in the main text of a number of German translations, including the 1984 revision of Luther’s translation.

The Greek word *staurós* (in 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18), commonly translated “cross,” does not in itself designate a long stake with a transverse beam but can denote a stake or pole. The *staurós* that Jesus and thereafter Simon carried was a beam, for a cross would have been too heavy for one man to carry or to drag. The Latin term *crux*, from which the English word “cross” is derived, can designate a tree or a wooden instrument on which victims were either hanged or impaled.

In the allegorical Epistle of Barnabas (thought to date from the early second century and so from a time when the Romans continued to practice crucifixion), the *staurós* is linked to the letter tau (T). Moreover, very limited archaeological

evidence does indicate that the Romans did make use of upright poles with a transverse beam. There does not seem to have been a standard way in which the Romans carried out crucifixions. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*War*, V, xi, 1), the soldiers, out of wrath and hatred for the Jews, nailed those they caught, one in one way, and another in another way.

It is commonly believed that upright stakes were already at Golgotha or that the beams that had been carried to the site were attached to three adjacent trees (or possibly even the same tree) there. The minority view (expressed, for example, in Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) is that Jesus was nailed in an upright position to the pole that Simon had carried and that it was not used as a transverse beam.

In 1 Corinthians 1:19, the wording of the quotation from Isaiah 29:14 is nearly identical to that of the extant Septuagint text. Instead of a form of the word for “reject,” “refuse,” “turn aside,” “disregard,” “void,” or “break” (*athetéo*), the Septuagint uses a form of the word for “hide” (*krypto*), as also do the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah.

In the time of Isaiah, the Israelites concluded that their outward worship, though lacking in genuine devotion, merited YHWH’s favourable attention. Through Isaiah, YHWH exposed their wrong view, letting them know that he would act in a manner that would cause wonderment, amazement, or astonishment. This would be by withdrawing his blessing, favour, and protection. In the face of the resulting disaster, the wise ones among the people would be unable to formulate a plan to deal with the distressing situation. Their wisdom would be destroyed, for YHWH would not aid them to see a way out and would leave them in a confused state. The intelligent ones among the Israelites would have nothing to offer. It would be as if YHWH had hidden their intelligence or understanding so that it could not be found.

Although Paul quoted from Isaiah 29:14 without making a contextual application, he used the words in a manner that harmonized with the message they conveyed.

Literally translated, 1 Corinthians 1:21 reads, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through [its] wisdom, God thought well to save the believers through the foolishness of the proclamation.” In relation to not knowing God, the expression “in the wisdom of God” has been understood in two basic ways. (1) In his wisdom, God has made it impossible for humans, by means of their own wisdom, to come to know him. (2) Despite the evidence of

the wisdom of God in the creation, humans, by means of their own wisdom, did not recognize him.

Both meanings are found in translations. “As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom.” (REB) “God was wise and decided not to let the people of this world use their wisdom to learn about him.” (CEV) *Denn obwohl sich seine Weisheit in der ganzen Schöpfung zeigt, hat ihn die Welt mit ihrer Weisheit nicht erkannt.* (For although his wisdom reveals itself in the whole creation, the world, in its wisdom, did not recognize him.) (German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*) *Denn weil die Welt, umgeben von der Weisheit Gottes, Gott durch ihre Weisheit nicht erkannte, gefiel es Gott wohl, durch die Torheit der Predigt selig zu machen, die daran glauben.* (For since the world, surrounded by the wisdom of God, did not recognize God through its wisdom, it pleased God well, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believed therein.) (Luther, 1984 revision [German])

1 Corinthians 2: 1-16

2. The Holy Spirit the agent of unity

Verses 1-13. The Spirit reveals true wisdom

Paul reminded his “brothers,” his fellow believers in Corinth, about the way in which he had presented the message about Jesus Christ. He had not come to them with impressive words or wisdom when he proclaimed the “mystery of God” or (according to another manuscript reading) the “testimony of God.” The apostle did not rely on a clever use of words or make a show of how wise he was in formulating persuasive arguments. When referring to the “mystery of God” or the “testimony of God,” he meant the message about Christ and how through him and what he accomplished by surrendering his life humans would be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to his Father. Whereas the Father had in ages past purposed to reconcile them to himself through his Son, this arrangement remained a mystery until Jesus Christ made his appearance on the earthly scene. (2:1)

Instead of resorting to means that were designed to impress others on an intellectual or emotional level like an eloquent orator or skilled debater, Paul decided to know nothing of that nature while among the Corinthians but made “Jesus Christ and him crucified” the focus of his message. Perhaps the apostle chose to know nothing other than “Jesus Christ and him crucified” on account of the limited results in Athens when he used thoughts from their own Greek writings as he reasoned with an audience that included philosophers. (Acts

17:16-34; see the Notes section on the kind of argumentation Epicurean philosophers may have used when arguing with Paul.) In Corinth, Paul's message centred exclusively on Jesus Christ and what his death made possible. (2:2)

Paul did not arrive in Corinth with a spirit of self-confidence, relying on his personal ability to persuade and impress. From a human standpoint, he came "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." There was nothing about Paul's personal bearing or manner of presentation that reflected the kind of power, boldness, and confidence that eloquent orators who can sway the masses display. He must have been keenly aware of his personal limitations, and concerned that his own weakness would not detract from his testimony regarding God's Son. (2:3)

Paul's "word" (either his message or his speech [the manner in which he presented the message]) and his preaching (either the content or the nature of his proclamation) did not reflect the persuasive power of human wisdom but did make evident "spirit and power." Likely the "spirit" is the spirit of God that worked mightily in and through the apostle as he carried out his commission. The "power" to which he referred could either be the power evident in the miracles that accompanied his preaching or the powerful effect that the message about Christ had on those who responded to it in faith. Responsive ones began living noble lives distinguished by deep concern and love for others, and they ceased to be enslaved to base desires. (2:4; see the Notes section.) The reason for Paul's approach was so that those who responded to his message and preaching would have a solid faith based on the evidence of God's power and not on the persuasive power associated with the display of impressive human wisdom. (2:5)

Either using the editorial first person plural or including his close fellow workers with himself, Paul contrasted human wisdom with the kind of wisdom he imparted. "We speak wisdom among the mature," he continued, "not, however, the wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age," which rulers he saw as coming to nothing or being deprived of their power. God was the source of the "wisdom" Paul made known, and it centered on Christ and what God accomplished through him. The "mature ones" among whom the apostle spoke this wisdom were those who, in faith, had embraced the message about Christ and whose thinking, disposition, and conduct had come to harmonize with his example and teaching. (2:6)

The wisdom revealed in what the Father did through his Son was far greater than the kind of human wisdom of the then-existing age and incomprehensible to the

rulers of the age. (2:6) In verse 8, Paul refers to the rulers of the age as having been involved in the Lord's crucifixion. This would have included Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, and the Jewish leaders. Possibly the apostle also had in mind the powers of darkness, for Jesus identified Satan as the "ruler of the world." (John 14:30) By his death in faithfulness, Jesus conquered the world (John 16:33) and, therefore, the apostle could rightly indicate that the rulers of the age had been stripped of their power. (Compare Colossians 2:15.)

A strong marker of contrast (*allá*, meaning "but") serves to introduce the superior wisdom as the "wisdom of God" that Paul spoke "in mystery, the hidden [wisdom], which God predetermined before the ages for our glory." The apostle's speaking "in mystery" does not mean that he himself concealed the wisdom, but that he made known the wisdom pertaining to a mystery that had remained hidden throughout the ages. This mystery related to what God had predetermined before the ages and included how humans would be forgiven of their sins, be divinely approved and, ultimately, attain glory—full sonship as his beloved children. The long-hidden mystery was disclosed when Jesus completed his earthly walk in faithfulness, surrendering his life and thereby providing the basis for repentant humans to be forgiven of their sins and to attain the status of approved children with glory in view. That glory is the sinless state of sonship that is in possession of God's unique Son, Jesus Christ. (2:7)

Not a single one of the rulers who had the opportunity to see Jesus came to know this wisdom, for they did not recognize him as the Son of God and his role in liberating humans from sin and condemnation. If they had known or recognized the wisdom of God, they would not have "crucified the Lord of glory," Jesus Christ. Had they recognized Jesus for who he was and his role in making reconciliation with God possible, it would have been inconceivable for them to have acted against him, either through active participation in sentencing him to death or by doing nothing to prevent this from happening. Herod Antipas, though he found no guilt in Jesus, had soldiers mock him. Prominent Jewish leaders incited the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified, and Pilate yielded to their will. (Luke 23:8-24) As God's Son, Jesus was the "Lord of glory" who perfectly reflected the very image of his Father, the glorious or magnificent one in the ultimate sense. (2:8)

"But, as it is written" in the sacred scriptures, "'Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,' and it has not come up in the heart [meaning 'mind' in this context] of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him." It appears that Paul used words from Isaiah 64:4 to show what had happened in the case of the rulers who rejected Christ. Their eyes did not see, and their ears did not hear with understanding, but they remained blind and deaf respecting Jesus' identity

and the things that would be made possible through him for those who loved God. Lovers of God revealed the genuineness of their love by accepting his Son and came to be recipients of what the unbelieving rulers could not have imagined as having been prepared beforehand by God—forgiveness of sins and an approved standing as his beloved children with all the blessings and privileges associated therewith. (2:9)

Including himself among those who love God, Paul continued, “For to us, God, through his spirit, has revealed [the things he has prepared], for the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” By means of his spirit, the heavenly Father has revealed to believers all that is needed about himself, his purpose, and his will for them. Everything that is the object of the spirit’s searching pertains to the things of God. This “searching” appears to relate to disclosing what would otherwise remain concealed. Thus, through the spirit, the object of the “searching out” of the things of God is revealed to believers but remains hidden from unbelievers. The “depths of God” could refer to matters relating to his identity (the kind of God he is) or to his will and purpose, which would include the things he has prepared for those who love him. (2:10)

Using a question, Paul illustrated that coming to know the things pertaining to God could only be by means of his spirit. “For who of men [among humans] knows the things of a man except the man’s spirit [that is] in him? So also the things of God no one knows except the spirit of God.” In the case of a man, the spirit that is within him, or the activating or motivating principle of his inner life, identifies who he truly is. Outward appearances are not enough for one to come to know a fellow human. Likewise, without the spirit of God, one could not come to know him and his will and purpose. That is why the things of God remain concealed to the unbelievers of the world, including those who are reputedly wise. (2:11)

The world of mankind that is an alienated state from God also has a spirit. This spirit influences or motivates persons who are a part of the world to think, speak, and act in ways that are centred on self, personal advantage, or the mundane affairs of life. This is not the spirit believers have received, for it is one that does not allow those who have it to perceive the things of God. It is because of having received God’s spirit that believers are in a position to know or recognize the things that he has graciously given them. These things would embrace all the blessings and privileges associated with having been forgiven of their sins and coming to be God’s approved children on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ and the surrender of his life for them. (2:12)

With the reference to speaking the things of God, Paul again used either the editorial first person plural or included his close associates as also sharing in the same kind of speaking. When speaking about the things of God, the apostle did not use words taught by human wisdom but those taught by the spirit. With the spirit-taught words, he explained “to the spiritual [the] spiritual.” (2:13)

Verses 14-16. The unregenerate man is totally ignorant of true wisdom

Paul did not use a new vocabulary but employed words in common use among the people to whom he proclaimed the message about Jesus Christ. The thoughts he conveyed with the words he spoke, however, were of a spiritual kind. He imparted divine teaching or words that were the product of the operation of God’s spirit upon him. The Greek plural noun in the dative case (*pneumatikoís*) is both a masculine and a neuter form of the word and so could mean either “spiritual persons” or “spiritual things.” The term that has been rendered “explain” (*synkríno*) literally means “judge with” (bring together to compare and then render a judgment on the basis of the comparison) and could denote “compare” or “interpret.”

If the reference is to “spiritual persons,” the thought could be that Paul discerningly adapted his spiritual teaching to those who were spiritual. A number of translations convey a similar sense. “We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.” (HCSB) “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” (ESV)

When regarded as applying to “spiritual things,” Paul may have been saying that, in his teaching, he explained spiritual things in words God’s spirit imparted to him. Translators who have adopted the sense of “spiritual things” have variously rendered verse 13. “Of these we speak — not in language which man’s wisdom teaches us, but in that which the Spirit teaches — adapting, as we do, spiritual words to spiritual truths.” (Weymouth) “We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths.” (NLT) *Von dem, was Gott uns durch seinen Geist offenbart, reden wir so, wie sein Geist es uns lehrt.* (Of that which God has revealed to us by his spirit, we speak just as his spirit teaches us.) (German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*)

As for the “unspiritual man” (the person who has no relationship with God), he “cannot receive” (or respond in a positive way to) what the spirit of God imparts, “for it is foolishness to him.” He cannot grasp the spiritual truths about Christ and his sacrificial death. These truths make no sense to him. It is

impossible for him to “know” or understand spiritual things, for spiritual things must be judged or evaluated spiritually. A proper understanding of spiritual things requires the guidance of God’s spirit, which unbelievers do not have. (2:14)

The spiritual man is able to judge, evaluate, or assess everything. Guided by God’s spirit, he can properly assess that which has lasting worth and is essential for his life as a servant of God and Christ. He himself, though, is not judged by anyone. No unspiritual person is able to assess who he is as a beloved child of God. (2:15)

Paul quoted words from Isaiah 40:13 (LXX), ““For who has come to know the mind of the Lord? Who instructs him?” But we [either an editorial first person plural or Paul and his close associates] have the mind of Christ.” In the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, the reference is to the “spirit of YHWH.” The Son of God did have his Father’s spirit, and so Paul, in his use of Isaiah 40:13, may have meant the “mind of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle did have the mind of Christ, enabling him to make proper judgments or evaluations. Unspiritual persons, though, did not have the mind of Christ and so could not rightly assess or evaluate Paul. (2:16)

Notes:

In his *On the Nature of the Gods*, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) placed the following arguments in the mouth of an Epicurean debater: “I inquire why these powers suddenly appeared as constructors of the world, and why for innumerable ages they were asleep, for it does not follow, if there was no world, that there were no ages. By ages I do not now mean those that are made up of a number of days and nights by means of the yearly revolutions, for I acknowledge that ages in that sense could not have been attained without a rotary movement of the heavens, but from infinitely far back there has existed an eternity, the nature of which in point of extent can be conceived, though it was not measured by periods of time.”

“What reason, again, was there why God should be desirous of decking the world, like an aedile, with figures and lights? If he did so in order that he himself might be better lodged, it is clear that for an infinite amount of time previously he had been living in all the darkness of a hovel. And do we regard him as afterwards deriving pleasure from the diversity with which we see heaven and earth adorned? What delight can that be to God? And if it were a delight, he would not have been able to go without it for so long. Or was this universe, as your school is accustomed to assert, established by God for the sake

of men? Does that mean for the sake of wise men? In that case it was on behalf of but a small number that so vast a work was constructed. Or was it for the sake of the foolish? In the first place there was no reason why God should do a kindness to the bad, and in the second place what did he effect, seeing that the lot of all the foolish is undoubtedly a most miserable one? The chief reason for this is the fact that they are foolish, for what can we name as being more miserable than folly? And the second is the fact that there are so many ills in life that, while the wise alleviate them by a balance of good, the foolish can neither avoid their approach nor endure their presence.” (Translated by Francis Brooks)

Admittedly, faced with this kind of argumentation, Paul would not have been very successful if he had tried to reason with the Epicurean and other philosophers on their terms.

There are various manuscript readings for 1 Corinthians 2:4, including a longer and a shorter version of the text. The expanded text reads, “persuasive words of wisdom”; the shorter version is, “persuasion of wisdom.”

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, the Greek of the quoted words do not match the Greek text of the Septuagint but are in harmony with the message they convey. The similar phrase in Isaiah 64:4(3, LXX) reads, “From the age [from long ago], we have not heard nor have our eyes seen a God besides you, and your works, which you will do for those waiting for mercy.” In view of the mention of God’s works for those who are waiting for his mercy, Paul could rightly speak of the things that “God has prepared for those who love him.”

Instead of a rendering that would allow for an application to the rulers, the *Revised English Bible* translates 1 Corinthians 2:9 in a way that can apply to all things God prepared beforehand for those who love him but which things long remained concealed from the understanding of everyone. “Scripture speaks of ‘things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him.’”

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

3:1-8a. The spiritual Christian

Verses 1-3a. The spiritual vs. the worldly

Even though Paul addressed the Corinthians as his “brothers,” many among them did not manifest themselves to be spiritual persons. In important aspects of life, they failed to follow the leading of God’s spirit. The apostle could not speak to them as spiritual persons but had to speak to them as fleshly persons, “as

babes in Christ.” They were believers and so were “in Christ” as members of his body. But, in certain respects, their conduct resembled that of unspiritual persons in the world of mankind alienated from God. Their behavior was infantile, and this prevented the apostle from sharing with them thoughts that were suited for truly spiritual believers who, in disposition, word, and action, proved themselves to be exemplary children of God. (3:1)

In keeping with their infantile condition, Paul imparted admonition that was suited for “babes in Christ.” He spoke of having given the Corinthians milk to drink and not the solid food that meets the needs of mature persons. In growth as disciples of Jesus Christ, they had not attained the level of strength that made solid food suitable for them, and this continued to be the case up to the time Paul wrote to them. His letter primarily served a corrective purpose and contained the kind of reproof that must often be given to immature youths. (3:2)

Verses 3b-8a. The results of worldliness

The infantile condition of many Corinthian believers was evident from their “fleshly” or unspiritual state. Jealousy (an envious and contentious rivalry) and strife (wrangling or discord) existed among them, revealing that they were “walking as men.” They were conducting themselves as men who were not following the lead of God’s spirit and had not truly transformed their lives to reflect the image of Christ. (3:3) A divisive party spirit had developed among them. To illustrate this, Paul continued, “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ but another [says], I [am] of Apollos, are you not [unspiritual] men?” When believers identify themselves as specifically belonging to a particular man as their leader, they are wrongly elevating him and failing to accord the proper honour to God. They are conducting themselves as people of this world who look to other humans as their leaders and guides. (3:4)

To assist the Corinthians to have a proper estimation of men in relation to God and Christ, Paul raised the questions, “What [Who, according to other manuscripts], then, is Apollos? And what [who, according to other manuscripts] is Paul?” They were “servants” through whom the Corinthians had become believers. Paul and Apollos were not owners or lords to whom any party loyalty was owing. They were servants of God and Christ, and servants who ministered to the Corinthians. Although others had become believers through their ministry, Paul and Apollos performed their individual service “as the Lord granted each [of them].” They carried out the service that the Lord Jesus Christ had assigned to them individually. (3:5)

In his role as one who first brought the message about Christ to Corinth, Paul “planted,” for a community of believers came into existence through his ministry. Later, Apollos proved to be very helpful to those who had become believers (Acts 18:27) and so functioned toward them as would a person who “watered” growing plants. But God was the one who made things grow. Through the operation of his spirit, he made it possible for the Corinthians to have what they needed to progress and flourish as his children. Emphasizing the transcendent importance of what God does in making things grow, Paul added that neither the one doing the planting nor the one doing the watering is anything. (3:6, 7)

3:8b – 23. The judgment of the believer’s works

Verses 8b – 9. Christian service to be judged

Although the person doing the planting and the person doing the watering may be different individuals, they “are one.” With reference to the plants, their labor has the same purpose. If the Corinthians had recognized this oneness of purpose in the service Paul and Apollos rendered, they would not have succumbed to a divisive party spirit. Whereas the labouring of Paul and Apollos was different, each one would receive his reward or wage in keeping with the work he performed. They were individually accountable to God for the way they cared for their respective tasks. (3:8)

In relation to the service they performed, Paul added, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” He and Apollos served in the furtherance of God’s work. As for the Corinthian believers, they were “God’s field, God’s building.” (3:9) Neither Paul nor Apollos were the owners of the “field” or the “building”; they were the Owner’s servants and laboured at his direction.

Verses 10-15. The believer’s judgment for service

After having likened the community of believers in Corinth to a “building,” Paul spoke about his labour in terms of construction. In keeping with the gracious favour God had given him, entrusting him with service as an apostle through the agency of his Son, Paul, as a “wise” or skilled master builder, “laid a foundation; someone else, however, [was] building [on it].” The foundation the apostle had laid was sound, for he proclaimed the truth about Christ and what he accomplished through his death. For this reason, Paul could speak of himself as a “wise master builder.” He had not made himself guilty of poor workmanship, failing to impart what the Corinthians needed to be a community established on the right foundation. Whereas he had faithfully discharged his task, Paul urged

the Corinthians individually to watch how they were building on the foundation. (3:10)

There was only one acceptable foundation, and that foundation had already been laid. Paul explicitly identified Jesus Christ as the foundation. Being on the right foundation requires having the proper view of Christ as one's Lord and of the need to live in harmony with his example and teaching. For believers, the objective of building on Christ as the foundation is to continue growing to become more like him. In the case of literal building operations, various materials may be employed—"gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw." (3:11, 12)

While the foundation may be sound, the nature of the building materials will determine the permanence of the superstructure. The apostle did not specifically identify the desirable or the poor or flawed materials individuals might use when building on Christ as the foundation. Jesus Christ was laid as the foundation through the proclamation of the truth about him, and the community of believers came into existence when they responded in faith. So it logically follows that proper building on Christ as the foundation involves the kind of teaching and response to it that would have a positive effect on the life of believers. The Sacred Scriptures contain the sound teaching, and those who impart sound teaching or who apply it to themselves are building with valuable and non-combustible materials comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones. When, however, doctrines, fanciful or speculative interpretations, "church" policies and rules, or traditions that have no apostolic precedence distort or misrepresent Jesus' example and teaching, the building work being done by persons who promote such things or who strive to conform to such things is comparable to using inferior building materials like wood, hay or straw. (3:12)

The kind of building "work" in which each individual engages will become apparent, "for the day will make it clear, because it is revealed in fire; and fire will prove what each one's work is like." The "day" could either refer to the future day of judgment when Christ returns in glory or any day that would result in an exposure of a builder's work. Numerous translations make the reference to the future judgment day explicit, either capitalizing "Day" (NAB, NIV, NJB, NRSV) or adding "of judgment" (CEV, NCV, REB). (3:13)

The phrase "in fire" has commonly been linked to the word "day." In his expanded translation, Kenneth Wuest conveys this meaning, "For the day will make it known, because it [the day] will be made clear as to its identity by means of one of its attributes, namely, fire." Other translations likewise render the verse to denote the "day." "That Day will appear with fire." (NCV) "The day

will show it plainly enough, for the day will arise in a blaze of fire.” (J. B. Phillips) “For that day dawns in fire.” (REB) “The Day which dawns in fire will make it clear.” (NJB) In view of Paul’s reference to building materials, however, there is a possibility that “in fire” may be understood as indicating that the previously mentioned “work” will be exposed “in fire.” The Greek word for “work” (*érgon*) is neuter gender, whereas the Greek word for “day” (*heméra*) is feminine gender. There is, however, no Greek pronoun for “it” in the text itself that definitively settles whether the intended antecedent is “work” or “day.” The passive third person singular verb for “reveal” (*apokalypto*) does not in itself restrict the meaning to “work” or “day.” (3:13)

Paul’s main point, though, is clear. Fire will prove the nature of the work, consuming anything comparable to wood, hay, and straw, and revealing the enduring quality of everything that can be likened to gold, silver, or precious stones. (3:13)

If, when submitted to the fire of judgment, a builder’s work remains, “he will receive a reward.” (3:14) Paul did not mention the nature of that reward but reasonably it would include God’s approval for faithful performance of work well done and additional privileges in divine service. (Compare Matthew 25:14-23; Luke 12:35-44; 19:12-19.)

The person who built with material that the fire of judgment exposed as worthless, with everything being burned up, would live, provided the foundation proved to be Christ. Such a one’s deliverance would be like that of a person who would lose everything in the fire but would himself be snatched from the flames. (3:15) Something similar happened to Lot and his daughters. They lost all their possessions but escaped the fiery destruction of Sodom.

Verses 16-23 Solemn warning to worldly believers

Paul reminded the community of believers in Corinth that they were “God’s temple” in which he resided by means of his spirit. (3:16) This added to the seriousness of the wrong kind of teaching individuals promoted or followed. Destructive teaching constituted an assault on God’s property.

Therefore, the man who made himself guilty of introducing destructive elements among believers would face grave judgment. His attempt to destroy God’s temple would result in ruin for him, for God would inflict on him the punishment of destruction. This is because, as Paul continued, “God’s temple is holy, which temple you [Corinthian believers] are.” The holiness or purity of the

“temple” or community of believers must be preserved, and anyone who exerted a corrupt influence would merit severe divine judgment. (3:17)

Among the Corinthian believers, many seem to have been impressed by the “wisdom of the age,” greatly admiring those who were eloquent and influential. This appears to be the reason Paul warned about not being self-deceived regarding such wisdom and added, “If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool so that he may become wise.” (3:18)

The kind of wisdom in which the people of that age took pride did not allow them to see the wisdom of God reflected in the arrangement for having their sins forgiven on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice and gaining an approved relationship with him as his children. It was a wisdom that relied on human ability to persuade and impress. Believers who regarded themselves as possessing this kind of wisdom needed to become fools, ceasing to rely on their own ability to impress, persuade, or sway others. As a result of coming to be persons who did not rely on or glory in impressive persuasive power, they would become truly wise. They would recognize the transcendent wisdom of God, grow as spiritual persons, and be freed from the party spirit that had come into existence because of judging others on the basis of values stemming from worldly wisdom. (3:18)

For many believers in Corinth, a change in attitude regarding worldly wisdom was needed if they were to cease being “babes in Christ.” Paul continued, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” He then quoted words found in the holy writings, “He catches the wise in their cleverness.” (Job 5:13) “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are empty.” (Psalm 94:11; [93:11, LXX]) In its application, worldly wisdom leads to wrong evaluations based on mere appearances and cannot fathom the things that are truly spiritual. From God’s standpoint, this wisdom is foolishness. (3:19, 20)

By means of worldly wisdom, the noble standing that God’s approved children enjoy cannot be attained. Those who may be admired in the world of mankind may be very clever in attaining their objectives. When, though, their wisdom stands in opposition to God’s ways, they eventually reap the consequences of their folly. Through the outworking of his moral law, God catches them in their “cleverness” or “cunning.” (3:19)

Similarly, when the thoughts of the “wise” are contrary to God’s ways, they are empty, futile, or vain. He knows these thoughts for what they are. They are worthless and will come to nothing. (3:20)

The aspects of worldly wisdom that sway humans (impressive personal bearing and persuasive power) tend to promote a divisive party spirit. Addressing this problem among the Corinthian believers, Paul emphasized the right view of men. The Corinthians were not to look to men as leaders, boasting in such men or taking pride in being among those with a special attachment to them. They were not to regard themselves as belonging to any human who may have been of spiritual help to them. Instead, they were to consider everyone who may have contributed to their spiritual life as belonging to them. Believers are not owned by fellow believers, but belong to one another as members of a beloved family of God's children. (3:21)

The apostle continued, "Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas [Peter] or the world or life or death or things now present or future — all belong to you, but you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God." Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were their brothers in Christ. They were servants of the community of believers as a whole. In the world of mankind, essential services and functions are performed, and from these believers derive benefits. Rightly, then, they can look upon the world as a servant, a functioning society of people that provides food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities. The life believers enjoy is at their disposal, to be used as a servant in a way that is appropriate for God's children. Even death is a servant. Through death, believers gain entrance into the fullness of eternal life upon being resurrected. Nothing that then existed in the human sphere or which would come to exist in the future would occupy the position of an owner. Believers belong to Christ. He is their Lord or Owner who laid down his life for them. Ultimately, believers belong to God, for Christ belongs to his Father as his unique Son. (3:22, 23)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, a number of manuscripts mention "divisions" (*dichostasíai*) as also existing among the Corinthians. This would mean that certain ones had cut themselves off from others, not associating freely with them.

The quotation from Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19 does not reflect the wording of the extant Greek text of the Septuagint. Of the principal words, only the term for "wise" is identical. Nevertheless, the meaning of the text is the same. In the context of Job 5, Eliphaz used the words to reprove Job, implying that he had sinned and, for this reason, had been seized in his cleverness. While Eliphaz erred in his judgment of Job's situation, his comments conveyed the truth that God catches or seizes the wise in their cleverness or cunning. Appropriately, therefore, the apostle used the words in keeping with this truth.

In 1 Corinthians 3:20, the quotation from Psalm 94:11 (93:11, LXX) follows the wording of the extant Septuagint text, with the exception of one word. Instead of the broader term “men,” the apostle used the more restrictive noun “wise.” In the context of Psalm 94, the men to whom reference is made would have viewed themselves as wise.

1 Corinthians 4: 1-21

4. The church and its leaders

Verses 1-8. The sin of judging God’s servants

Based on the discussion that follows, the first person plural “us” appears to include Paul and fellow apostles (particularly apostles of congregations whom he knew personally). It was his desire that others would consider him and them as “servants” or “helpers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” As servants of Christ, they would be advancing his interests, declaring the message about him and assisting others to become and remain his loyal disciples. The “mysteries of God” related to his arrangement for humans to be forgiven of their sins and come into an approved relationship with him as his children. As stewards, Paul and fellow apostles would be making known the “mysteries of God,” which had long remained hidden but came to be fully revealed when his Son arrived on the earthly scene. From the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to heaven, those entrusted with the stewardship of the “mysteries of God” needed to make them known to others. (4:1)

The position of a steward was one of trust. Though themselves servants, stewards had significant responsibilities, often being in charge of a body of servants and the management of the owner’s property. Therefore, as Paul noted, the essential requirement for stewards was that the owner would find them to be “faithful,” trustworthy, or dependable. (4:2)

As one whom God and Christ owned, Paul gave no weight to any judgment humans might render concerning him. When speaking of such evaluation as a “least thing” or insignificant matter, he used the expression “human day,” meaning a time for humans to hold an accounting or to pass judgment. Even he did not judge or make an assessment of himself. (4:3)

Although Paul was not aware of anything against himself in the discharge of his divinely granted stewardship, this did not prove that he was justified or free from any fault. The judgment that counted was not his own, but that of his Lord, the one who would judge him. In view of his thereafter referring to the coming of the Lord, Paul meant the Lord Jesus Christ. (4:4)

Having established that human judgments have no real significance, the apostle admonished the Corinthians not to judge anything “before the time,” but to wait until “the Lord comes.” He is the one who “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.” (4:5)

For believers to pass judgments on others in relation to their service of Christ would be premature and disrespectful to him as the Lord who has the authority to judge his servants. He, not humans, is able to bring to light things that may have been done in secret (whether good or bad). Though certain acts may have been concealed from human view as under the cover of darkness, they are not hidden from the Lord Jesus Christ. He can also reveal the “counsels of the hearts” or the aims or purposes originating in the inmost selves of the individuals, disclosing the true motives that he is unerringly able to discern. Upon receiving his favourable judgment, individual believers will then come to have “praise from God,” receiving commendation that truly counts. (4:5)

It was for the Corinthians or for their benefit that Paul had applied to himself and Apollos the things he wrote. This suggests that he did not include the names of those to whom certain ones looked as leaders and who had a following, resulting in divisions within the community of believers. By using himself and Apollos as examples, Paul wanted to illustrate the impropriety of setting up men as leaders. Regarding his purpose, he said, “so that through us you may learn not to go beyond the things written.” The “things written” could refer to what Paul had written or the “sacred writings,” which exalt God, not men. When the words directed against an inordinate elevation of humans are heeded, this prevents people from having an inflated view of one person over another. (4:6)

Paul then raised the question, “For who differentiates you?” This has been understood in two basic ways: (1) For who makes you different from another person? (2) For who discerns anything different in you? (4:7)

Regardless of which way the question is understood, the implied answer is that one person is not so outstandingly distinguished from another as to make him more important. In their renderings, a number of translations make the question implicit, which also affects the implied answer. “Who says you are better than others?” (NCV) “Who made you so important?” (NJB) “Who confers distinction upon you?” (NAB) “What is so special about you?” (CEV)

The apostle continued, “What do you have that you did not receive? If, however, you also received [it], why do you brag as [if] you did not receive [it]?” The gifts or endowments the Corinthians had were not of their own making. They

had received these endowments, ruling out all grounds for boasting and exalting humans. (4:7)

In their infantile spiritual state, many of the Corinthians reflected a boastful spirit, which appears to have been directly linked to their looking to certain men as their leaders. In their prideful manner of acting, they made it appear as if they had attained everything they wanted. This is evident from the questions Paul directed to them. “Already satisfied, are you? Already rich? Begun reigning without us?” He would have wished that they had indeed been reigning so that he and his fellow apostles could reign with them. (4:8)

Verses 9-21 The holy dedication of the apostles

The apostle contrasted his own humiliated state and that of the other apostles with the prideful or assumed elevated state of many in Corinth. The hardships and dangers from which he and the others had not been divinely shielded made him think that God had exhibited him and them like men appointed to die as a spectacle during the last event in an amphitheatre or arena, a spectacle to “the world [*kόσμος*], both [literally, and] to angels and to men.” (4:9)

Paul continued, “We are fools on account of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are glorified, but we are dishonoured.” (4:10) To the world alienated from God, they appeared like fools, subject to mockery and abuse. In their own estimation, certain ones in Corinth, on the other hand, regarded themselves as wise. Submitted to persecution and ridicule, Paul and his fellow apostles appeared to be weak. Those in Corinth who boasted in their presumed exalted state, however, seemed strong. They were held in honour, whereas Paul and his fellow apostles were in disgrace, treated as nobodies.

To that very “hour” or time, they experienced hunger, thirst, nakedness (not having sufficient clothing for comfort), and beating or mistreatment. In carrying out their ministry, they were wanderers, without a place to call home. (4:11)

Paul and his fellow apostles toiled with their own hands to support themselves, probably doing so to the point of weariness. Though others reviled them, hurling abusive words at them, they did not retaliate in kind or pronounce curses but “blessed” those who were intent on harming them. They wanted to see a change for the better among those who treated them hatefully. In their attitude and expressions toward them, Paul and his fellow apostles desired good to come to them. Persecuted, he and the others patiently endured the ill treatment. (4:12)

Though themselves defamed, they, in a loving and caring manner, entreated those who had not been favourably inclined, appealing to them to become reconciled to God. Until then, unbelievers regarded them like the “rubbish of the world, the trash of all things.” They looked upon Paul and his fellow apostles as worthless garbage. (4:13)

When drawing this sharp contrast between their presumed exalted state and his own circumstances as a divinely chosen and commissioned apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul did not do so to shame the Corinthians or to make them painfully aware of the folly of their ways. He did so as a fellow believer who deeply loved them. As he had first brought the message about Christ to them and they had responded, they were like children to him for whom he had deep care and concern. His words served to admonish them as his beloved children. (4:14)

They might have many “tutors” in Christ, but they did not have many “fathers.” “In Christ” or by virtue of his being at one with Christ and in his service, Paul had become their father through the evangel. (4:15)

The “tutor” (*paidagogós*) of ancient times filled the role of a guardian who led a youth to his teacher. So, although the Corinthians might have many tutors “in Christ” or fellow believers who looked out for them and their spiritual interests, Paul’s role was unique. He was the first to be among them, proclaiming the message about the Son of God. Through his ministry in the service of Christ, the community of believers had come into existence. In that sense, he was their only “father.” (4:15)

While ministering to the Corinthians, Paul had been like a loving and concerned father, setting a good example for them. For this reason, he could rightly appeal to them, “Become imitators of me.” (4:16) He had not exalted himself and so did not contribute to the divisive party spirit that had developed among the Corinthians. He was in their midst as one serving, labouring with his own hands to supply his needs. In his teaching, Paul directed their attention away from himself and to Jesus Christ and his Father. (Compare Acts 20:31-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-12.)

To remind them about the manner he had conducted himself and what and how he had taught, Paul informed them that he was sending Timothy to them. A very close relationship existed between Paul and Timothy. The apostle referred to him as “my beloved and faithful [trustworthy or dependable] child in the Lord.” Young Timothy proved to be like a beloved son to Paul in their mutual relationship of oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle had the utmost confidence in Timothy, telling the Corinthians, He “will remind you of my ways

in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in all the congregations.” (4:17; see the Notes section.) In the manner Timothy would conduct himself in their midst, the Corinthians would see the same loving and caring disposition that Paul had displayed. (Compare Philippians 2:20.) In keeping with the apostle’s example, Timothy would make God and Christ central to his teaching, imparting instruction that would serve to promote love, strengthen faith, and encourage praiseworthy conduct and compassionate concern for others. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:3-5; 4:6-11; 6:6-10, 17-19.)

Whereas Paul had proved himself to be an example worthy of imitation as a loyal disciple of Jesus Christ, certain ones among the Corinthian believers had a very negative view of him. They appear to have felt that Paul was personally afraid to come to Corinth again. This seems to have led to their manifesting an arrogant attitude, conducting themselves in a manner that did not advance the cause of God and Christ. (4:18)

Addressing these self-important detractors, Paul continued, “I shall soon come to you, if the Lord wills.” (4:19) Even in his personal determination, he acknowledged that the visit would take place provided it proved to be the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Upon being in Corinth, Paul would be in position to “know” or see the difference between the talk of the inflated detractors and their power. The implication is that those who were impressed by their own self-importance could make boastful claims, but they did so without any power or authoritative backing. (4:19)

“The kingdom of God,” or the reign of God in the lives of believers who recognize him as their Sovereign, is not a matter of words. It manifests itself “in power.” Submission to God’s rule produces a real transformation in the lives of individuals. Through the powerful working of Holy Spirit, believers come to reflect the image of God to an increasingly greater extent. (4:20)

Divine power was at work in Paul as an apostle and so he challengingly asked those who looked down upon him as weak, “What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of mildness?” They needed to think seriously about whether they would prefer to see Paul in the role of a strict disciplinarian or whether they would be better served if he came to them as a loving brother, with a gentle or kindly disposition. (4:21)

Notes:

The Greek word *kósmos*, though commonly associated with the human sphere or the world of mankind, was also used by the ancient Greeks to designate the universe. In view of the reference to angels and men, the meaning of “universe” seems to fit in 1 Corinthians 4:9.

In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul, in his relation to the Corinthians, referred to their not having many fathers but that he had become such to them “in Christ.” This did not mean that he wanted believers there to call him “father,” which would not have been in harmony with Jesus’ words to address only his Father in that manner. (Matthew 23:9) The context limits the apostle’s words to his role in having initially brought the good news about Christ to the Corinthians. This is apparent from the fact that Paul revealed that his relationship to them came about “in Christ” (by virtue of his oneness with Christ and their having come to share in that oneness with the Son of God) and “through the evangel” (or through the good news that he proclaimed and which they accepted). “In Christ Jesus, I have fathered you through the evangel.”

Manuscripts vary, either including or omitting the name “Jesus” in 1 Corinthians 4:17.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

5. The problem of the immoral believer

Verses 1-5. Carnality blinds to the presence of gross immorality

A shocking case of sexual immorality came to be known as existing among the community of believers in Corinth. One man had taken up living incestuously with his stepmother, “the wife of his father.” This conduct violated even the mores of non-Jews, making it virtually unheard of. (5:1; see the Notes section.)

Nevertheless, a significant number of the Corinthian believers took pride in this outrageous development, perhaps feeling that it was an evidence of their great freedom in Christ. Instead of being inflated about what had happened in their midst, they should have mourned or been grievously saddened by it and taken action to clear themselves of this blot on them as a community of believers. They should have removed the practiser of this badness from their midst. (5:2)

Even though Paul was not personally present (“absent in body”), he was there “in spirit,” or there in his thoughts. Already, as if personally present, he had

determined that the incestuous man should be expelled from the congregation. (5:3)

Therefore, at a time when they would all be meeting “in the name” of the Lord Jesus (or in recognition of Jesus’ authority as the head of the congregation), the believers in Corinth and Paul, who was there “in spirit” (as he had expressed his thoughts), were to take action. “With the power” of the Lord Jesus, they were to hand the incestuous man over to Satan. Paul’s mention of Jesus’ power suggests that the action of the congregation would have the authoritative backing of the Son of God. This would not be an arbitrary action, but one that Jesus Christ approved, for it harmonized with his example and teaching. (Compare Revelation 2:20-23.) In the community of believers, God is recognized as Sovereign and all associated acknowledge Jesus as their Lord through loyal submission to him, heeding his teaching and imitating his example. For the man to have been handed over to Satan would have meant expelling him from the congregation and exposing him to the world where the adversary exercises authority. The incestuous man would then find himself outside the realm where God’s spirit is at work, and would be in the realm where people lived without any knowledge of God and were primarily guided by their sensual desires. (5:4, 5)

Paul explained that the congregational action would serve “for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.” The apostle often used the designation “flesh” (*sárξ*) to designate sinful human nature. In the case of the incestuous man, he had yielded to it, and the “flesh” or his sinful nature had become the controlling force in his life. For the man’s “spirit” to be saved in the day of the Lord, or for him not to experience the condemnation of those alienated from and at enmity with God at the time the Lord Jesus Christ returned in glory, required that his “flesh,” or that the dominion of his sinful human nature, be destroyed. With his sinful human nature having been deprived of dominance, his “spirit,” his real self, or he himself in his inner being would no longer be divinely disapproved. Accordingly, Paul’s ultimate hope was that, upon again experiencing what it meant to be in the sphere where the influence of Satan exists, the man would come to repentance and cease to be enslaved to sin. (5:5)

Verses 6-13. The principle of the yeast of sin

The fact that the Corinthians had boasted about what had happened in their midst was not good. Paul reminded them of the danger of corruption, “Do you not know [or recognize] that a little leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough]?” (5:6) The incestuous man had proved to be like leaven in the community of

believers. His outrageous action could have emboldened others to make themselves guilty of similar God-dishonouring actions.

Paul urged the Corinthians to rid themselves of the “old leaven” or the corrupt element in their midst. As a result, they would be a “new batch,” a community free from “leaven” or corruption. This would be in keeping with the reality that Christ, their “Passover [lamb],” had been sacrificed. (5:7) Just as the firstborn Israelites in Egypt were saved from death by the blood of the Passover victim, the blood of the Christ, the “Lamb of God,” provides the basis for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the condemnation of death.

“Therefore,” Paul continued, “let us keep the festival, not with old leaven nor with leaven of badness and wickedness, but with unleavened [loaves] of sincerity and truth.” (5:8) Among the Israelites, the Festival of Unleavened Bread followed the observance of the Passover. During the entire festival, no leaven or leavened items could be used. Christ, as the Passover lamb, died once for all time. Accordingly, the life of believers is comparable to the continual observance of the “festival,” free from the kind of defilement or corruption that leaven can represent because of the effect a small amount can have when introduced into a large batch of dough. Believers should lead lives that are comparable to bread free from leaven and, therefore, reflecting “sincerity” or purity (not adulterated by depravity and evil) and “truth” (whatever is true, right, or proper). (5:8)

Paul referred to having written them about not associating with or keeping company with sexually immoral people. The Greek verb for “write” (*grápho*) is in the aorist tense and is here understood as meaning that the writing of the letter occurred in the past. The letter known as “1 Corinthians” does not contain an earlier mention of the point about association. So it appears that the letter to which Paul referred has not been preserved. Possibly a misunderstanding had resulted from the earlier letter, for the apostle seems to clarify what he meant. (5:9)

It was not Paul’s intent for the Corinthians to conclude that they must cut off all association with immoral persons or individuals engaging in other wrongs — greed, theft, or idolatry. Believers still found themselves in the world and had to interact with unbelievers who lived in a manner contrary to God’s ways. Therefore, for the Corinthians to have no association with sinful people would have required physically getting out of the world, which would have been impossible for them. (5:10)

Paul wanted them to understand that he meant that they should not associate with anyone who identified himself as a “brother” or fellow believer but lived a debauched life of sexual immorality, greediness or idolatry, or proved to be a reviler, drunkard, or thief. They were not even to eat with such a person. At that time, believers regularly met in homes, partaking of meals with fellow believers and enjoying spiritual fellowship. Because table fellowship was very much a part of the life of the community of believers, Paul specifically mentioned that they should not eat with those who called themselves “brothers” but continued to carry on sinful practices. (5:11)

As far as those outside the community of believers was concerned, Paul raised the question, “For what have I to do with judging those outside?” Disciples of God’s Son have not been granted authorization to judge or condemn persons who are part of the world, but they do have the right and duty to render a judgment respecting gross sinners inside the congregation. Paul expressed this thought with a question, “Do you not judge those inside, whereas God judges those outside?” In agreement with their responsibility to pass judgment on gross sinners in their midst, the apostle admonished the Corinthians, “Expel the wicked one from among yourselves.” (5:12, 13)

Notes:

Neither in verse 1 nor in subsequent verses did Paul mention any action to be undertaken against the woman who was likewise guilty of incest. This suggests that she did not happen to be a believer.

For the opening words of verse 4, there are various manuscript readings (“in the name of our Lord Jesus”; “in the name of the Lord Jesus”; “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”; “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”). Depending on the punctuation that is chosen, this phrase can be linked to the words that either precede or follow it.

In the comments on verse 4, the opening phrase is explained as relating to the meeting of the Corinthian congregation. Numerous translations convey this significance. “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan.” (NIV) “When you are all assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, through the power of our Lord Jesus you are to consign this man to Satan.” (REB) “When you have gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus, with the presence of my spirit, and in the power of our Lord Jesus, hand such a man over to Satan.” (NJB)

There is a possibility, however, that the phrase, “in the name,” applies to the action Paul had taken when expressing his judgment on the incestuous man. “I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.” (NRSV) “But in the name of our Lord Jesus I have already judged this man.” (CEV) “Concerning the one who has done this, I have already passed judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (NLT)

A less likely significance for the phrase would be to apply it to the wrongdoer’s claim to have acted “in the name of the Lord” (“on the man who has done such a thing in the name of the Lord”; NRSV, footnote).

In 1 Corinthians 5:5, numerous manuscripts have an expanded reading for the expression “day of the Lord” (“day of the Lord Jesus”; “day of the Lord Jesus Christ”; “day of our Lord Jesus,” and “day of our Lord Jesus Christ”).

With the exception of either a different initial verb or a different form of the same verb, the Greek words of 1 Corinthians 5:13 are the same as those in the Septuagint for the last phrase of Deuteronomy 13:5(6) and 17:7.

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

6:1-8. The disorder of legal suits

Verses 1-8. Christian using Christian

Paul raised the question about whether any of the Corinthians were so daring or bold as to bring a case against a fellow believer “before the unrighteous and not before the holy ones.” (6:1) The “unrighteous” would have been unbelievers who served in the capacity of judges and were not bound to act in harmony with the teaching and example of God’s Son. For believers to prefer the judgment of unbelievers would have been an affront to the “holy ones” or fellow believers.

Continuing to reason with the Corinthians regarding this, the apostle asked, “Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the least things? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more so matters of [daily] life!” (6:2, 3)

The apostle provided no details about the role of the holy ones in judging the world and angels, his main point being that they would be handling far weightier matters than those involving the affairs of ordinary life. While on earth, Jesus had told the apostles that they would be acting as judges at the time he would be exercising royal authority. (Matthew 19:28) Paul’s words indicate that this judging would not be limited to the apostles. With Jesus’ being both king and

judge by his Father's appointment, all judging of humans (the world of mankind) and angels would be under his direction and in harmony with the ultimate standard of divine justice. The Scriptures refer to disobedient angels as facing future judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and it is likely that they are the ones to whom Paul made reference. (6:2, 3)

In view of their future judging responsibilities, it would have been inconsistent for believers not to make decisions about minor or ordinary matters as if they were completely unworthy or unfit to do so. Unbelievers who served as judges had no divine assurance of being granted a far more significant role in judging nor did they know or recognize God's standard of justice. From the standpoint of a standing before God, they had none and were without honour. For this reason, they could be spoken of as persons having no particular worth. So, when believers chose to take ordinary cases before them, they were seating persons looked down upon as their judges, making them their superiors in relation to the congregation. (6:4)

6:9-20. The snare of fornication

Verses 9-20 The Christian tempted by fornication

When thus reasoning with the Corinthians, Paul's intent was to jolt them to their senses, causing them to be ashamed of how they had acted. Was there not one wise person in their midst who had the capability to judge? By their actions, they suggested that not a single one among them had the needed wisdom, for "brother" or fellow believer went with "brother" to be judged by unbelievers. (6:5, 6)

Taking fellow believers before judges of the world had already meant complete failure or defeat for the Corinthians. It reflected a spirit contrary to that of Christ, because greed, vindictiveness, or retaliation (not generosity, compassion, love, and forgiveness) would have been the underlying factors prompting such litigation. It would have been preferable or better for believers to have been wronged, treated unjustly, or defrauded than for them to take action that wronged others. In this case, they wronged and defrauded their own "brothers" or fellow believers. (6:7, 8)

It appears that those in Corinth who resorted to litigation and thereby harmed fellow believers lost sight of the fact that unjust persons would not inherit God's kingdom, prompting Paul to raise the question whether they did not "know" this. In the sphere where God is recognized as Sovereign, there is no place for practitioners of injustice nor for those who engage in other injurious practices. The

Corinthians were not to be misled in this regard, imagining that certain unjust or harmful actions were exempt from divine condemnation. Those engaging in sexual immorality, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (*malakós*), men who have sexual relations with males (*arsenokoítēs*), thieves, covetous or greedy persons, drunkards, revilers or defamers, and robbers or extortioners will not inherit God's kingdom. They will have no share in the realm where God is acknowledged as Sovereign and where his ways are loyally followed. (6:9, 10)

Before becoming believers, some of the Corinthians had engaged in the very practices that would keep one out of God's kingdom. They had, however, repented of their past conduct and had been washed clean, sanctified or set apart as holy, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God." On the basis of their faith in the Son of God and the value of his shed blood, they had been forgiven their sins and thus washed clean from the stain of their past transgressions. No longer did they continue in an impure or defiled state, but they had been set apart as members of God's holy or clean people. They had also been justified or put right with God, gaining an approved standing before him. All this had taken place "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" or on the basis of who he is and what he accomplished through his death. Moreover, God's spirit began operating within them, producing the changes in their lives that conformed to divine holiness or purity. (6:11)

Accordingly, the freedom that Christ opened up to them was liberation from sin and its condemnation. This, however, was not a freedom without limits. Duties were associated with this liberty. Whereas believers might have the right to do certain things, out of regard for the conscience of others they would lovingly refrain from any action that could give rise to needless offense. The apostle Paul commented on this aspect, saying, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything." The "all things" include everything that he, as a spirit-guided believer, had every right to do. He recognized, though, that what he could do in certain cases would not necessarily be beneficial in its effect on others and in its outworking for him. Paul was not going to permit anything (any desire or inclination) to gain the mastery over him, interfering with his loyalty to God and Christ and creating a cause of offense or stumbling for others. (6:12)

It appears that there were those in Corinth who did not recognize the importance of not being dominated by desires. They seem to have excused sexual immorality on the basis that it served to satisfy a natural desire, a desire comparable to that for food. Paul, though, made the difference very clear. "Foods for the stomach, and the stomach for foods, but God will make an end to

both it [the stomach] and them [the foods]." The body, however, [is] not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord [is] for the body." (6:13)

On earth, foods suitable for the human stomach are available, and the stomach is equipped to digest these foods. The future glorified body believers are to have does not need food and the digestive system. Moreover, the moderate eating of food has no effect on the inner life of the individual at the present time nor in the future. Therefore, neither the eating of certain foods nor the abstaining from certain foods has any bearing on God's view of the individual. (6:13)

This is not the case with sexual immorality, for the body is "for the Lord" Jesus Christ, to be used in harmony with his Father's will and not for sexual immorality. The Lord is "for the body." He is at one with the body and supplies it with what it needs to remain in living unity with him. (6:13)

Although the resurrection body will be a changed glorified one, having a different nature in an incorruptible state, it will be the entity that links the past life to the future life. This seems to be the apparent reason for Paul's reference to the resurrection. "God also raised the Lord and will raise us through his power." The reality of Christ's resurrection provides the assurance that dead believers will rise through the operation of God's mighty power. Therefore, they should preserve the body in purity, for the transformed glorified body with which they are to be raised makes a continuity of existence possible. (6:14)

While still on earth, believers belong to Christ and so their bodies are not their own. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Believers are at one with Christ as members of his congregational body. So Paul raises the question, "So shall I take the members of Christ [and] make them members of a harlot?" His emphatic answer is, "Never may it be!" For believers, their relationship with Christ precludes any union with a harlot or any form of sexual immorality. Through sexual union of any one of his body members to a harlot, Christ would, in effect, be joined to a harlot. (6:15)

This is because, as Paul reasoned with the Corinthians, "Do you not know that one who joins himself to a harlot is one body [with her]?" He then supported this conclusion with words quoted from Genesis 2:24, indicating that, in the intimate relationship of a man and a woman, the two would be "one flesh." (6:16)

The union with Jesus Christ is not of a physical nature, "but the one joined to the Lord is one spirit [with him]." Having the mind of Christ, the believer is one in

thought and purpose with him in finding delight in the doing of his Father's will. (6:17)

For the believer to continue at one with the Son of God makes it imperative to maintain sexual purity. "Flee from sexual immorality. Every sin a man may commit is outside the body, but he who engages in sexual immorality sins against his own body." Every effort should be made to avoid situations that could lead to temptation. One should strive to escape from such circumstances as would one fleeing from danger to life and limb. Unlike other sins that do not involve the body so completely, the committing of sexual immorality makes the body as a whole, in a very intimate manner, the instrument of sin. Therefore, the man who engages in sexual immorality sins against his own body, which he uses in a sinful manner. (6:18)

For believers, this is very serious, for the body is to remain a sacred place, a temple for the Holy Spirit that comes from God. For anyone to commit sexual immorality would constitute a defilement of this temple or sanctuary, showing gross disrespect for God who has provided his spirit to promote holiness or purity within the believer and which cleanliness should be evident in the outer life. (6:19)

Believers are not their own. They have been bought with a costly price—the precious blood of the Son of God who sacrificed his life for them. As persons purchased, they belong to God and should rightly glorify or magnify him in their owned body, using their whole physical being in a manner that reflects the highest regard for his requirements in matters of conduct. (6:19, 20; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 6:9, the Greek word designating a male prostitute is *malakós*, literally meaning one who is "soft" and designating the passive man or boy in same-sex intercourse. The word *arsenokoítes*, a compound consisting of "male" and "bed," appears in the same verse and applies to the dominant male in a same-sex relationship, the aggressive seducer, or the sexual abuser of boys.

Greek manuscripts contain different readings in 1 Corinthians 6:11, including "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the name of the Lord Jesus."

The quotation in 1 Corinthians 6:16 from Genesis 2:24 includes the Greek words found in the Septuagint reading of the Genesis passage. The Greek form of the word for "says," which introduces the quotation, has been translated to mean "it

says” or “he says.” This is because the Greek third person singular verb (*phesín*) can mean “it says,” “he says,” or “she says [which English meaning would not fit the context].” In the Genesis account, the statement may be understood as being attributed to God, allowing for the meaning “he says.” The meaning “it says” would also fit, for it is said in scripture or in the Torah.

The concluding words of 1 Corinthians 6:19 (“and you are not of yourselves,” meaning “you are not your own”) may be understood as part of the question that starts at the beginning of the verse. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God, and [that] you are not your own?” The other possibility is that the concluding phrase of verse 19 starts a new sentence that is completed in verse 20. “And you are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”

Numerous manuscripts contain an expanded text in 1 Corinthians 6:20. After the admonition “glorify God in your body,” other manuscripts add, “and in your spirit” or “and in your spirit, which is of God.”

1 Corinthians 7: 1-40

7:1-24 Regulations of Christian marriage

Verses 1-9. The purpose of Christian marriage

At this point in his letter, Paul addressed matters concerning which the Corinthians had written to him. Seemingly, in view of the then-prevailing conditions believers faced, he indicated that it would be “good” or preferable for “a man not to touch a woman” (that is, in an intimate manner as a husband). (Compare Genesis 20:6.) A number of modern translations render the phrase, “not to touch a woman” according to its apparent meaning. (7:1) “It is a good thing for a man not to have intercourse with a woman.” (REB) “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” (NCV)

On account of the prevalence of sexual immorality, however, the apostle indicated that it would be advisable for a man to have his own wife, and a woman to have her own husband. (7:2)

A husband would be obligated to render the conjugal due to his wife, and the wife would likewise be under obligation to her husband. (7:3; see the Notes section.) Neither the husband nor the wife are to deny the other mate of the rightful marital due. For this reason, Paul mentioned that the wife and the husband do not exercise control of their own bodies but their mates do. (7:4) They should not deprive one another of the conjugal due except by mutual

consent. One reason for the mutual agreement would be for the opportunity to devote themselves to prayer. Numerous manuscripts also include “fasting.” After a period of abstinence for spiritual reasons, married couples are advised to resume customary intimacies and thus avoid temptation. Strong sexual desires could leave a marriage mate open to Satan’s trap and would result in being ensnared into engaging in sexual immorality. (7:5)

Paul’s reference to his making a concession seemingly relates to the temporary withholding of marital dues by mutual consent. His words, though, were not intended as a command. (7:6)

Probably because of what he was able to accomplish as a servant of God and Christ in the unmarried state, Paul expressed the personal view that he wished all believing men were single as he was. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that this would not be possible for everyone, for each person had his “own gracious gift from God, one in this way and one in another.” (7:7)

In the case of unmarried persons and widows, Paul said that it would be good for them to remain single as he was. (7:8) If, however, they did not have the kind of self-control that would allow them to live a single life in purity, it would be better for them to marry than to be consumed with passionate desires (literally, “to be set on fire”). (7:9)

Verses 10-24 Regulations governing Christian marriage

In the case of married couples, Paul directed that a wife should not separate from her husband. If a separation were to occur, the wife should either remain single or seek reconciliation with him. Also a husband should not leave his wife. This harmonized with Jesus’ teaching that marriage was to be a permanent union. (Matthew 19:3-9) To indicate that his words had Christ’s authoritative backing, Paul said, “Not I, but the Lord.” (7:10, 11)

The apostle identified guidelines for which he did not have any specific teaching from the Son of God. Relative to the situation of a believer being married to an unbeliever, Paul acknowledged, “I say, not the Lord.” If a believing husband (literally, a “brother”) had an unbelieving wife and she was willing to continue living with him, he should not leave her. Likewise, if an unbelieveing husband assented to remain with her, she should not leave him. (7:12, 13)

Neither unbelieveing husbands or wives are unclean to their believing marriage mates. As far as the marriage is concerned, the unbelieveing husband is sanctified or made holy, clean, or pure through his believing wife, and the same is true of a believing husband (the “brother,” according to numerous manuscripts) with

reference to his unbelieving wife. If this were not the case, the offspring of the parents would be unclean, but as Paul added, “Now they are holy.” In God’s view the children are acceptable and not defiled. (7:14; see the Notes section.)

If, though, the unbeliever chose to leave, the believer would not try to prevent it. The “brother or sister” would not in that case be in a state of bondage. Believers would not be obligated to put forth extraordinary efforts in attempts to keep the marriage intact. (7:15)

The reason for the position of believers regarding the separation is, “God has called us [you, according to other manuscripts] to peace.” Manuscripts that say “called us” indicate that God’s call or invitation is one into a relationship of peace with him and, to the extent possible, with fellow humans. For a believer to try to preserve a marriage that an unbeliever did not want would lead to conflict, disrupting the peace to which God had called the believer. Other Greek manuscripts read “called you,” and could be understood to relate more specifically to the situation of believers whose unbelieving mates choose separation. In that case, their departure could serve to contribute to the restoration of the peace to which God has called believers. (7:15) The apostle then raised the questions, “For how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?” (7:16)

In the event they relate to unbelieving marriage mates who are willing to remain with believers, these questions would point to the beneficial result that could come about when believers do not choose separation. Unbelievers, upon continuing to see the exemplary conduct of their mates, may eventually respond in faith to the Son of God and come to be his disciples. “Remember: a wife may save her husband; and a husband may save his wife.” (7:16, REB)

There is a greater likelihood, though, that the questions are more directly linked to the situation where the unbeliever leaves the believer, as suggested by the conjunction “for.” The thought appears to be that there is no way for a believing wife or husband to know whether the unbelieving mate would become a disciple of God’s Son and be saved from the condemnation to which sin leads. This, then, would be another reason for not trying to hinder the unbeliever from leaving. “But God has called you to live in peace: as a wife, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your husband; as a husband, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your wife?” (7:15, 16; NJB) “After all, God chose you and wants you to live at peace. And besides, how do you know if you will be able to save your husband or wife who isn’t a follower?” (7:15, 16; CEV)

Believers should regard their lot, portion, or station in life as one “the Lord” has given them. Their Lord Jesus Christ has not regarded it as needful to effect a change in their circumstances to make their service to him more acceptable. His Father called them or invited them to be his people in the state in which they continued to find themselves. Accordingly, it was right for believers to “walk” or to conduct themselves in keeping with the state in which God had called them. This is the guiding principle Paul set forth in all the congregations or the communities of believers to which he had ministered. (7:17; see the Notes section.)

If a man was called as one circumcised, he should not seek to become uncircumcised. Likewise the uncircumcised one should not conclude that he must get circumcised. Neither the circumcised nor the uncircumcised state means anything in relation to how God regards persons who accept his Son. What does count is whether believers observe God’s commandments. (7:18, 19)

Believers should remain in the condition or state in which they were individually called, not resorting to extraordinary means to force changes. (7:20) If a person was called while a slave, he should not let that be a cause for concern or worry. (7:21)

After introducing the thought about the possibility of becoming free, Paul directed his words to a slave, “rather use.” This could mean that the slave should use his present circumstances to the full. Another possibility is that, if he can rightfully obtain his freedom, he should do so, affording him more opportunities in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. (7:21) Translations convey both meanings in their renderings. “Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.” (NRSV) “Even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave.” (NJB) “Though if a chance of freedom should come, by all means take it.” (REB) “But if you can win your freedom, you should.” (CEV)

For a slave, his condition of servitude had no bearing on his relationship to the Son of God. He had been called “in the Lord” while a slave in order to enjoy this new relationship. The calling “in the Lord” may denote being invited to a life of fellowship with him. A slave who was thus called to be at one with the Lord Jesus Christ would then be his freedman, one set free from enslavement to sin and granted the noble standing of a son of God and a person who belonged to Christ as his Lord. The one who enjoyed the status of a free man, never having been a slave, would likewise have a new relationship as one belonging to Christ as his servant or slave. (7:22)

All believers share the same dignified standing as servants or slaves of God and Christ. This is because all of them were bought with a price, the precious blood of the Son of God who sacrificed his life for them. As divinely owned persons, believers should not become slaves of men, granting them the kind of authority over them to which only God and Christ have the right. In view of their new relationship as children of God and as his and his Son's servants or slaves, believers should remain in the state or condition in which he has called them to belong to him, not attempting to force a change in status. (7:23, 24)

7:25-40 Married vs. the unmarried state

Verses 25-31. The general principle

Regarding virgins, the apostle did not have any specific teaching or command from the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, based on the mercy the Lord had shown him, commissioning him as an apostle to the nations because of regarding him as trustworthy, Paul gave his opinion. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:12-14.) His view would have been that of a dependable apostle who was keenly aware of the need to be guided by God's spirit. (7:25)

On account of the then-existing difficult situation (*anánke*, meaning "necessity," "constraint," "pressure," or "distress"), Paul thought it good for a man to remain in the state in which he found himself. If bound to a wife, he should not seek a separation. As for a man who was free from a wife, he should not be looking for one. If, however, the unmarried man chose to marry, he would not be sinning. Likewise, if a virgin married, she would not be committing sin. (7:26-28)

Nevertheless, marriage would not be without problems. As Paul indicated, those who married would have "distress" in the "flesh." He wanted to spare fellow believers, encouraging them to remain single if this would not pose a problem for them on account of the prevalence of sexual immorality in the world. The "distress" for those who married included the cares and concerns for a marriage mate and children, especially when experiencing sickness in the family or facing situations that would make obtaining life's necessities difficult. Believers often faced persecution. Their homes might be plundered or they could even be forced to flee. Marriage mates, parents, and children could be separated because one or more of the family were imprisoned. At times, Christ's disciples were tortured or even killed. (7:28)

The apostle did not know when Jesus Christ would return in glory, but he had firm faith that this would take place. Possibly the existing circumstances prompted him to conclude that the time was short, or he may have referred to the

shortness of the time to express certainty about what lay ahead. At any rate, the instability in the human sphere makes it essential for believers to live their lives with a measure of detachment, for relationships and circumstances can change very quickly. (7:29)

Paul advised that married men be as though they had no wives, that mourners be as persons who did not weep, that joyful persons be as those not rejoicing, that buyers be as individuals who did not possess what they purchased, that those using what the world had to offer be as persons who did not make full use of the world. The apostle recommended this course because the “form [*schéma*] of this world is passing.” (7:29-31)

Verses 32-40 Contrast between the married and unmarried state

The transitoriness of everything related to human life makes it advisable for believers not to become unduly attached to whatever is subject to change. Unforeseen occurrences can deprive one of friends and loved ones. Neither times of sorrow or joy continue indefinitely. If possessions are not lost, they will eventually wear out. Believers live in the world, and so make use of what human society makes available. The apostle’s admonition is not to use the world to the full, probably meaning not to become totally absorbed in the mundane affairs of life but to limit one’s focus to essentials. (7:29-31)

In the earthly sphere, humans find themselves as on a stage with ever-changing backdrops and props. The Greek word *schéma* can denote the “form,” “outward appearance,” “shape,” or “aspect.” In its present form, the world or everything that makes up the human sphere is continually changing or passing away. (7:31)

Paul wanted fellow believers to be as free from worry or anxiety as possible, attaining this objective by limiting their attachments. The unmarried man is anxious or concerned about the Lord’s matters, how he might please Jesus Christ his Lord. A married man has additional anxieties or concerns relating to the world or the human sphere, how he might please his wife. As a result, “he is divided.” It is not possible for him to focus exclusively on pleasing his Lord. (7:32-34)

Likewise an unmarried woman or a virgin can be anxious or concerned about the affairs of the Lord. This would be by maintaining a holy or pure state in body and in spirit, not defiling her body through sinful acts or her spirit by manifesting an improper disposition (envy, jealousy, a lack of love or compassion). A married woman, like a married man, has additional cares and

concerns. She is anxious about the affairs of the world or matters pertaining to the sphere of human existence, desiring to please her husband. (7:34)

When referring to singleness as preferable, Paul did not mean to put a restraint on fellow believers as one might put a noose on an animal, endeavouring thereby to stop them from getting married. His objective was to set forth thoughts that could benefit them when they considered what would be the better course for them personally and, if possible, to choose the one he recommended. Under the existing circumstances, the state of singleness would have been appropriate and would have permitted them to be fully devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, free from the added concerns that attended married life. (7:35)

There is considerable uncertainty about the situation Paul had in mind when referring to someone who thought he was acting inappropriately (*aschemonéo*) toward his “virgin” (*parthénos*). While the “someone” is a man, there is a question regarding his relationship to the virgin. (7:36)

A view that has not gained wide acceptance takes the Greek word *parthénos* to denote “virginity” and so represents Paul as speaking of an unmarried man’s own virginity. This seems unlikely. In Greek, the word for “virginity” is *parthenía* (found in Luke 2:36), and one would expect the apostle to have used this term if that is what he had meant. (7:36)

Translators have commonly represented the virgin as a young woman to whom the man is engaged. “If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong [*hypérakmos*], and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.” (NRSV) “But if a man feels that he is not behaving properly towards the girl to whom he is betrothed, if his passions are strong and something must be done, let him carry out his intention by getting married; there is nothing wrong in it. But if a man is steadfast in his purpose and under no obligation, if he is free to act at his own discretion, and has decided in his own mind to respect her virginity, he will do well. Thus he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who does not marry does better.” (REB) “But suppose you are engaged to someone old enough to be married, and you want her so much that all you can think about is getting married. Then go ahead and marry. There is nothing wrong with that. But it is better to have self-control and to make up your mind not to marry. It is perfectly all right to marry, but it is better not to get

married at all.” (CEV) The Greek text, however, is not as definitive as these renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 would suggest.

From the Greek text, one cannot determine whether the adjective *hypérakmos* (literally, “above the acme”) applies to the man or the virgin. When describing the virgin it has been understood to mean “past the prime” or “past marriageable age.” Translations that render the verse to apply to the man opt for such meanings as “strong passions” or “at one’s sexual prime,” basing this on the meaning of “exceedingly” for the prefix *hypér*. Moreover, the context is not clear about the nature of the inappropriate thinking toward the virgin. The Greek word *aschemonéo* does not in itself have a sexual connotation but refers to acting in a manner that is contrary to an accepted standard. (7:36)

Among the Jews and others in the Greco-Roman world, the accepted standard for virgins was for them to get married. So there is a possibility that Paul described a situation involving a father and his virgin daughter. This view is reflected in alternate renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 found in the footnotes of various translations. “If you feel that you are not treating your grown daughter right by keeping her from getting married, then let her marry. You won’t be doing anything wrong. But it is better to have self-control and make up your mind not to let your daughter get married. It is all right for you to let her marry. But it is better if you don’t let her marry at all.” (CEV, footnote) “Still, if there is anyone who feels that it would not be fair to his daughter to let her grow too old for marriage, and that he should do something about it, he is free to do as he likes: he is not sinning if there is a marriage. On the other hand, if someone has firmly made his mind up, without any compulsion and in complete freedom of choice, to keep his daughter as she is, he will be doing a good thing. In other words, the man who sees that his daughter is married has done a good thing, but the man who keeps his daughter unmarried has done something even better.” (NJB, footnote)

If the words of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 apply to a father and his virgin daughter, the man who decided not to give her in marriage would be one who was settled in his “heart” (meaning either his mind or within himself) and had “authority” or full control over “his own will,” not feeling pressured by the prevailing views in the community. The determination not to give his daughter in marriage would be a resolve of his “own heart” or his own inner conviction. He would not be a father with the kind of concerns expressed in the book of Sirach (42:9, 10, NRSV), “A daughter is a secret anxiety to her father, and worry over her robs him of sleep; when she is young, for fear she may not marry, or if married, for fear she may be disliked; while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and

become pregnant in her father's house." (See the Notes section for a literal reading of 7:36-38.)

Regardless of the specific situation involving the virgin, the main point is that Paul recommended the unmarried state as the preferable one. The Corinthians would have understood the specifics. Culturally, we today are not in the same situation, and the precise application of the apostle's words is immaterial. There is, however, no ambiguity about his view of singleness and the clarity with which he identified thoughts that represented his opinion as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the case of a married woman, she is bound to her husband for as long as he lives. His death would free her to marry another man if she chose to do so. For a believing widow, remarriage should be "in the Lord," meaning that it would be a marriage to a fellow believer who was at one with the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Paul's opinion, the widow would be happier if she did not marry. When expressing this opinion, the apostle believed that he had God's spirit and so his words agreed with the spirit's guidance. (7:39, 40)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 7:3, a few later manuscripts read *opheiloménen eúnoian* ("owing benevolence"), which would not be limited to conjugal dues.

The oldest extant manuscripts and quite a number of others read "brother" in 1 Corinthians 7:14, but numerous later manuscripts say "man" or are more specific in identifying the man as believing.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17, many later manuscripts refer to "God" (not "the Lord") as apportioning each one's lot and then "the Lord" (not "God") as doing the calling. Instead of *diatássomai* ("I order" or "I command"), a number of manuscripts read *didásко* ("I teach").

A literal reading of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 would be, "But if anyone thinks inappropriately about his virgin, if being beyond the prime, and so it ought to be, what he wants to do, let him do; he is not sinning. Let them marry. But one who stands settled in [his] heart, not having necessity, but having authority over his own will, and this he has judged in his own heart, to keep his own virgin, he will do well. So also the one giving in marriage does well, and the one not giving in marriage will do better."

In Book V of *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher Plato presents a discussion wherein Socrates expresses his views about the acme of life. In this discussion

the question is raised, “What is the prime of life?” The answer follows in the form of a question, “May it not be defined as a period of about twenty years in a woman’s life, and thirty years in a man’s?” Subsequent comments reveal that a woman was regarded as being past her prime when her childbearing years ended at the age of forty. A man was considered past the prime of physical and intellectual vigour at the age of fifty-five.

In the Greco-Roman world, widows of childbearing age were expected to marry again. In view of Paul’s letter to Timothy encouraging younger widows to marry (1 Timothy 5:14) , it would appear that his statement about widows to the Corinthians (7:39, 40) applies to older widows. Among the Romans, it was regarded as honourable for women to have been faithful to one husband for their whole life, with inscriptions on tombstones including the word *univira* (of one husband). A late first-century BCE inscription (known as the *Laudatio Turiae*) contains the husband’s praise of his deceased wife, a woman to whom the designation *univira* applied. Regarding the marriage, the inscription reads, “Marriages as long as ours are rare, marriages that are ended by death and not broken by divorce. For we were fortunate enough to see our marriage last without disharmony for fully 40 years.” (Translated by E. Wistrand)



Statue of Demeter, the mother goddess who personified the natural processes of fertility and growth

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

8. Christian liberty

Verses 1-3. The law of love the solution

Regarding food offered to idols, believers had the “knowledge” that idols were powerless, lifeless representations. This knowledge in itself did not assure right conduct, for, as Paul continued, “Knowledge inflates, but love builds up.” One who has certain knowledge may look down on others as ignorant, and so knowledge can breed conceit and contempt. Love, on the other hand, is reflected in a kindly view of fellow humans and a compassionate regard for their limitations. The loving person does not make others feel low and despised but builds them up, showing consideration for their feelings and treating them as valued people. (8:1)

If individuals imagine they know something (without being guided by love), they do not know it as they should. Apart from love (a selfless interest in the happiness and welfare of fellow humans), knowledge can be hurtful, with its possessors assuming an arrogant bearing toward others, treating them in a contemptuous manner, or failing to consider their feelings and limitations. (8:2)

“But if anyone loves God, this [person] is known by him.” God acknowledges as his own only those who love him, and this love is demonstrated by treating others in a loving manner. In the case of believers, this especially requires demonstrating love for fellow children of God. (8:3)

Verses 4-13. The law of knowledge inadequate

Continuing to comment about eating food offered to idols, Paul added, “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is but one God.” Representations of deities are lifeless objects of human manufacture and cannot produce any change in meat or any other food from an offering. The deities that the lifeless images represent are nonexistent, for there is only one living God. (8:4)

In the Greco-Roman world, there were many so-called gods, “whether in heaven or on earth.” Among millions today, this is still the case. Many who have no knowledge of the true God (or do not recognize him) revere deities which they believe to exist in the earthly and the super-terrestrial realms. (8:5)

Although there are “many gods and many lords,” followers of Christ recognize only “one God, the Father, from whom all things are and we for him, and one

Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and we through him.” The Father is the ultimate source of everything. Believers live for him. Jesus Christ, their Lord, is the one through whom the Father brought everything into being. The concluding phrase (“and we through him”) could point to the fact that believers owe their identity as children of God to Christ. They are what they are through Jesus Christ and what he accomplished when dying sacrificially. (8:5, 6)

In the first century, many did not know or recognize that an idol was a nothing thing and that only one true God existed. Before becoming believers, certain ones among the Corinthians when eating food offered to idols had done so with a worshipful regard for the idol. Even though they had become disciples of God’s Son, they still had a weak conscience, one that was defiled because they had formerly been conditioned to believe in the existence of the deity that the idol represented. For this reason, they could not eat any food that had once been offered to an idol without the feelings and thoughts associated with their past life as idolaters. (8:7)

“But food will not make us stand before [*parístemi*] God.” The Greek word *parístemi* can signify to “stand before,” “place beside,” “bring before,” or “present.” The thought could be that food will not bring one closer to God. Another possibility is that food will not bring one before God so as to be judged on that basis. The reason food would neither bring one nearer to God or cause one to stand before him for judgment is because the act of eating a certain food has no bearing on one’s relationship with him. Paul added, “If we do not eat, we are not worse off; if we eat, we are not better off.” (8:8)

Whereas eating or refraining from eating certain food was immaterial, this did not mean one did not need to be considerate of others. The apostle admonished the Corinthians to watch or to exercise care that they did not make use of their “authority” or right to eat certain food in a way that could result in putting an obstacle before those with a weak conscience, causing them to sin. (8:9)

If a believer with a weak conscience observed a fellow believer who had “knowledge” (the specific knowledge that an idol was a nothing thing that could not in any way make food different because of having been part of an offering) eating a meal at an “idol temple” (probably meaning one of the dining rooms in the temple courtyard), this could be spiritually ruinous to the one with a weak conscience. It could encourage him to the point of actually eating food offered to idols. His previous idolatrous conditioning would bring back the same thoughts and feelings he had before he became a believer, and his eating would then prove to be an idolatrous act. (8:10)

In this way, the other individual's "knowledge" (without the guidance of love) would have brought ruin to the one with a weak conscience. This would have been very serious. The believer who failed to take the weak conscience of a fellow believer into consideration would have made himself responsible for causing his brother to sin, a brother for whom Christ died. The brother with the weak conscience belonged to Christ and was very precious to him. (8:11)

If any of the Corinthians thus sinned against their brothers and wounded their weak consciences, they would have made themselves guilty of sinning against Christ. The brothers with weak consciences were fellow children of God and members of the body of which Christ is the head. (8:12; see the Notes section.)

Pointing to his own course of action, Paul highlighted the right course to take. If food could cause his brother to stumble, being led to commit sin, he would never again eat meat. Out of loving concern for the spiritual well-being of his brother, a fellow member of God's family, the apostle would willingly forgo what he had the right to do. (8:13)

Notes:

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) contains an abbreviated version of 1 Corinthians 8:3, "But if anyone loves, this one is known."

In 1 Corinthians 8:12, the oldest extant Greek manuscript (P46) does not include the word for "weak" when mentioning the conscience.

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

9. The church and its workers

Verses 1-15. Church leaders are to be honoured and supported

In all aspects of his service as an apostle, Paul never insisted on his rights. It appears that his detractors tried to use this against him in efforts to discredit him. Therefore, with pointed questions, the Scriptures, and Jesus' teaching, the apostle provided the answer to those who were making a wrong assessment of him and his course of action.

"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" Paul did have the freedom to make use of the rights he had as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. On his way to Damascus, he had his encounter with the risen Lord and received his commission. Paul's having seen Jesus proved that he was indeed an apostle. Moreover, the Corinthians had

become believers through his ministry. Their being Paul's "work in the Lord" could mean that they were the product of his labors for the Lord. It is also possible that the expression "in the Lord" applies to the believers in Corinth. As the apostle's work, they were "in the Lord" or at one with the Lord as members of his body. (9:1)

From the standpoint of communities of believers where Paul had not ministered, he would not have been an apostle directly for them, but he was indeed an apostle to the Corinthians. As the ones who had become believers through his ministry, they were the "seal" of his apostleship "in the Lord." The Corinthians as a community of believers, like a seal, constituted authentic proof of Paul's being in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ as an apostle with a divine commission. (9:2)

To those who wrongly judged him, Paul directed his defense. (9:3)

"Do we not have the authority to eat and drink?" As an apostle, he had the right to be the recipient of meals in the homes of those to whom he ministered. (9:4)

"Do we not have the authority to lead a sister as a wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (9:5) Paul did have the right to be married to a "sister" (a believing wife) and to have her share the hospitality extended to him. The believing wives of other apostles accompanied them. This was also true of the "Lord's brothers," among whom James was the most prominent. His brother Jude, the writer of the letter bearing his name, was also married. In the second century CE, Hegesippus wrote about the grandsons of Jude in connection with an incident during Domitian's reign, "And there still survived of the Lord's family the grandsons of Jude, who was said to be His brother, humanly speaking. These were informed against as being of David's line." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 20 [translated by G. A. Williamson])

Although the designation "apostles" applied to any of the surviving twelve and apostles of various congregations, Paul mentioned Cephas (the Semitic equivalent for the Greek name Peter) separately. He was a married man at the time he became one of Jesus' disciples, and his mother-in-law was then living in the home he shared with his brother Andrew. (Mark 1:29, 30) Possibly because Cephas or Peter was well-known to the Corinthians, Paul chose to mention him by name. (9:5)

Paul and Barnabas worked in order to support themselves. The other apostles to whom Paul referred depended on those to whom they ministered to supply life's

necessities. In view of this, he raised the question, “Do only I and Barnabas not have the authority not to work?” (9:6)

To prove that he and Barnabas had the same right as the others to refrain from working to obtain life’s essentials, Paul reasoned with the Corinthians on the basis of examples from ordinary life and the Mosaic law. “Who ever soldiers at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not partake from the milk of the flock?” (9:7) The Corinthians would not have doubted that those who rendered services were entitled to benefit from the work they performed.

Paul did not just speak on the basis of customary practice among humans. With a question he introduced the point that the law also says what can be observed regarding benefits, rewards, or wages from work. “Does not also the law say these things?” (9:8)

The apostle next referred to what is written in “the law of Moses,” quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4 (LXX), which passage contains the command not to muzzle a threshing bovine. Regarding this command, Paul raised the questions, “Is the bovine the concern to God? Or is it altogether for our sakes it says [this]? Indeed for our sakes it has been written.” This, as Paul continued, would be because both the one ploughing and the one threshing ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the result of the labour at harvest time. (9:9, 10; see the Notes section.)

The apostle knew the Scriptures well. So it is inconceivable that he meant that God cares nothing about animals, which is not a thought the Scriptures support. (Compare Psalm 104:10-22; Jonah 4:11.) Cattle were not to be tormented by being prevented from eating some of the grain they were threshing. The law, however, was not committed to writing for animals that could neither read nor understand its requirements. It was given to the Israelites as an expression of God’s loving concern for them, and they were to benefit from its teaching. Accordingly, if consideration was to be shown to animals, how much more so should this be true of humans! Those labouring should rightly expect recompense for their work, and this is evident from the law that prohibited the Israelites from muzzling threshing bovines.

Applying the principle to the labour expended in furthering the cause of Christ, Paul made the point that the spiritual sowing he did while with the Corinthians would give him the right to partake of their “fleshly” or material things. There would be nothing “great” or out of the ordinary for Paul to have shared in the “fleshly things” of their “harvest,” or the material things (primarily life’s

necessities) that they had been able to obtain through their labours. Others had made use of this authority or right. Appropriately, then, Paul could ask whether he, even more so, would not be entitled to do so. (9:11, 12; see the Notes section.)

He, however, did not avail himself of this right but willingly carried his own burden, labouring with his hands to support himself. Paul did this to avoid anything that might hinder “the evangel of Christ.” He did not want anyone to think that his labour in making known the glad tidings about the Son of God had material gain as its object. The apostle was very concerned that, as far as depended upon him, nothing would distract from the message about Jesus Christ and what he accomplished in sacrificing his life. (9:12)

Continuing to emphasize his right to receive material support, Paul, with a question, reminded the Corinthians that those working at the temple ate from a portion of the offerings, as did those who officiated at the altar. (9:13) Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ directed that those who proclaimed the evangel or the good news about him should “live” by it, or be supported by their labour in proclaiming it. (9:14) When Jesus Christ sent out his disciples, he told them not to take any provisions with them, but to rely on the hospitality of responsive ones for their needs. (Luke 10:4-7)

Paul, though fully entitled to receive material support, chose to perform manual work for life’s necessities. Moreover, he did not write about this matter so as to start making use of his rights. Expressing himself strongly regarding his position about not seeking material aid, he told the Corinthians that it would be better for him to die than to do so. He did not want anyone to deprive him of his basis for boasting, or for taking pride in his course of action. This was no false pride on the apostle’s part, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that no one could legitimately accuse him of carrying out his ministry for material gain. (9:15)

Verses 16-27. True church leaders are to be rewarded

He would not have the same reason for “boasting” or taking pride in what he was doing if he had procured his means of living from proclaiming the evangel. As a divinely commissioned apostle, he regarded himself as compelled to declare the good news about Christ. Knowing that his failing to do so would merit severe judgment, Paul added, “For woe is to me if I did not preach the evangel.” (9:16)

If he proclaimed the glad tidings willingly or gladly, he would obtain a reward. Paul would then experience the joy and satisfaction resulting from having been

rightly motivated to discharge his ministry in the service of Christ of his own free will. If, on the other hand, he really did not want to do the work, he would still be under the obligation of the stewardship entrusted to him. Therefore, even if he had been unwilling to carry out his assignment (as was, for example, the prophet Jonah), he would not have been discharged from his duty. (9:17)

The mere discharge of an obligation would not have been rewarding. So, fittingly, Paul raised the question, “What then is my reward?” It was to proclaim the evangel without cost, not making use of his right for financial support, so as not to abuse his authority as one entrusted with the message about Christ. For Paul, the non-obligatory choice of not making full use of his rights proved to be his reward, one to which he could point with proper pride as evidence of his unconditional willingness and sincerity when laboring to further the interests of Christ. (9:18)

The apostle was not the servant or slave of any human. With reference to all, he was free. For the purpose of advancing Christ’s cause, though, he had made himself the slave of all in order to gain the most persons possible. (9:19) In matters that had no bearing on faithfulness to God and Christ, Paul willingly chose not to avail himself of his rights but showed consideration for the scruples and feelings of others and complied with the customs of the people among whom he laboured. When with Jews, he conducted himself as a Jew in order to gain them for the Son of God. To those who considered themselves bound by the law, he proved to be like a man who was likewise under its obligations. This was a willing choice on his part, for he knew that he was not under the law. His approved standing before God rested on faith in Christ, not law observance. Nevertheless, to win those who were under the law, he proved to be to them as one who was likewise under the law. (9:20; compare Acts 16:3; 21:20-26)

Among the non-Jewish peoples who were not under the law, Paul lived as one not bound by the law. He freely associated with Gentiles, making no distinction between Jew and non-Jew in his personal interactions. In his impartial dealings with them when sharing the good news about Christ, his objective was to win them. This did not mean that Paul conducted himself in a lawless manner. He lived uprightly as a servant of God and not as a person without God’s law. The apostle’s exemplary life demonstrated his being under the law of Christ. For Paul, the commands, teaching, and example of the Son of God were the law he faithfully followed. (9:21)

To the weak, those with a sensitive conscience and scruples that would have been immaterial to him, Paul came to be like one of them to gain them. He came to be “weak” from the standpoint of showing consideration for their limitations,

not insisting on his rights. (Compare Romans 14:1-3; 15:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 8:13.) To help others to come to salvation through faith in Christ, Paul proved himself to be all things to all people, willingly and gladly foregoing his personal rights. (9:22)

In everything he did, the apostle acted for the sake of the evangel or the glad tidings about the Son of God, desiring to become a “sharer of it.” His actions were always consistent with his objective to advance the cause of Christ. (9:23)

Paul’s role as a “sharer” of the evangel may either be as one who would participate in the blessings or benefits resulting from faith in the good news about Christ or as one who would be making the message known to others. Modern translations commonly make the meaning explicit in their renderings. “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” (NRSV) “I do all this for the good news, because I want to share in its blessings.” (CEV) “All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others.” (NJB) “I do all this for the sake of the Gospel; I want to play my part in it properly.” (J. B. Phillips) The Greek term for “sharer” (*synkoinonós*) can designate a fellow partner or participant, and this may favour the meaning of one who shares in the benefits or blessings the message about Christ offers to those who respond to it in faith. (9:23) “And I do everything for the sake of the Good News, that I may share with my hearers in its benefits.” (Weymouth)

The course that Paul pursued in his ministry required real effort and self-discipline. This appears to be the reason for the comments that follow, likening the life course of believers to that of participants in athletic contests. All those in the race would run, but only one would receive the prize of victory. In the case of believers, winning in their race (their life course distinguished by faithfulness to God and Christ) is not limited to one victor, but exertion is essential. Paul urged, “Run in order to receive [the prize or the divinely promised reward].” (9:24)

In preparation for athletic contests, the participants had to exercise self-control in everything, adhering to a strict regimen and submitting to supervised training under circumstances that were more difficult than would be faced during the actual events. The athletes were willing to do this for the prospect of winning and being crowned with a victory wreath fashioned from perishable plant material (wild olive leaves, pine foliage, laurel, or wild celery). Instead of a perishable garland, believers have an incorruptible victory crown awaiting them at the end of a life course completed in faithfulness. They will be rewarded with the enjoyment of life in the sinless state and share in all the benefits and

blessings that have been divinely promised to those who remain loyal to God and Christ. (9:25)

With reference to his own exertions, Paul indicated that he did not run without an aim or purpose. He was not like a boxer throwing punches in the air. (9:26) Instead, he exercised control over his body as though beating (*hypopiázo*) it into subjection and leading it as a slave. Paul was concerned about an exemplary life course, exerting himself with all the strength that he could muster to maintain it. He did not want to be found personally disapproved after having preached to others, telling them the glad tidings about Christ and urging them to repent and to become his disciples. (9:27)

Notes:

The wording of the Septuagint in Deuteronomy 25:4 and that of the quotation in 1 Corinthians 9:9 are the same in numerous manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200). Other manuscripts contain a different term for the Greek word meaning “muzzle.”

The Greek word for “says” (*légo*), at the end of verse 10, is third person singular and could be rendered either “it says” or “he says.” If the verb is to be understood to mean “he says,” the reference could be either to God or to Moses. In case the meaning should be “it says,” the application would be to the law or Torah.

In verses 11 and 12, the Greek verbs are first person plural. The context indicates that Paul referred to himself when using the editorial “we.”

The words of 1 Corinthians 9:15, “I did not make use of any of these [things],” are ambiguous. There is no specific plural antecedent for the neuter “these.” Translators have commonly rendered the verse as indicating “right” or “rights” to be the implied antecedent, but the Greek word for “authority” or “right” the apostle used is the singular feminine noun *exousía*. Perhaps “these” may be understood to include Jesus’ directive and the examples Paul had previously mentioned to show what he, as an apostle, would have been entitled to do.

According to the oldest extant manuscripts, the concluding part of 1 Corinthians 9:15 reads, “my boasting no one will nullify.” It is commonly believed that the varied readings of later manuscripts, including “that anyone should nullify my boasting,” are scribal corrections.

The Greek word *anánke* (in 1 Corinthians 9:16) conveys the compulsion Paul felt about declaring the glad tidings concerning Christ. This term denotes

“need,” “necessity,” “constraint,” or “pressure.” The prophet Jeremiah expressed himself somewhat similarly when speaking of the pressure he felt to proclaim the word of YHWH despite the intense hostility he faced, “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:9, NRSV)

In 1 Corinthians 9:20, later manuscripts omit Paul’s mentioning that he was not under the law.

Instead of “but I do all things,” later manuscripts read (in 1 Corinthians 9:23), “but this I do.”

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul’s use of first person plural pronoun “we” does not appear to be intended in the editorial sense but likely is meant to include fellow believers.

The Greek word *hypopiázo* (in 1 Corinthians 9:27) means to “give one a black eye” or to “strike one in the face” and is suggestive of very harsh treatment.

1 Corinthians 10:1-33

10:1-15. The church’s heritage

Verses 1-5. Old Testament typology and its lessons

Drawing on the example of what befell the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt, Paul illustrated the need for the Corinthians to exert themselves to remain faithful to God and Christ. The apostle did not want his “brothers,” fellow believers in Corinth, to be “ignorant” or to lose sight of the ancient events and the significance of these to them personally. The reference to “our fathers” could be understood as Paul’s speaking from the standpoint of a Jewish believer or his including the non-Jewish believers as having become part of the true Israel, with Abraham (by virtue of his faith) being the “father” of all believers. (Compare Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:7; Philippians 3:3.) Regarding “our fathers,” Paul said that all of them were “under the cloud and passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (10:1, 2)

When the sea opened up, allowing the Israelites to cross to escape the Egyptian pursuers, water was on both sides of their path. The column of cloud that had been in front of them passed over them, and took its place behind them. In this way, they came to be under the cloud, and they passed through the sea, with its waters forming a wall on their right and their left. (Exodus 14:19-22) So, “in the

cloud” that moved over them and “in the sea” through which they passed, all the people were baptized “into Moses,” being united as a corporate body to him as their leader or head and YHWH’s unique “servant.” (Exodus 14:31)

Thereafter, in the wilderness, “all ate the same spiritual food.” As a miraculous provision, manna had a spiritual source and thus proved to be a spiritual provision for sustaining the Israelites. (10:3)

“All drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.” The Israelites received a miraculous supply of water from a rock at the beginning of their journey in the wilderness and then years later in another location at the close of their wilderness wandering. (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11) So it appeared as if the rock from which the water had been miraculously obtained had followed them. (10:4)

According to the view of ancient rabbis, the rock accompanied the Israelites. The Tosefta (*Sukkah* 3:11, Jacob Neusner’s translation) says, “The well which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was a rock, the size of a large round vessel, surging and gurgling upward, as from the mouth of this little flask, rising with them up onto the mountains, and going down with them into the valleys. Wherever the Israelites would encamp, it made camp with them, on a high place, opposite the entry of the Tent of Meeting.” Whether Paul expressed himself about the rock from the standpoint of what appeared to be the case or with an allusion to ancient rabbinical thought cannot be determined from the context. He did, however, make use of typology, identifying the “rock” with Christ, the source of living water for all who put faith in him. (10:4)

In the case of the Israelites, the miraculously provided water had a spiritual source and could be regarded as life-sustaining spiritual drink. Through Christ, believers receive spiritual water, a provision that is essential for eternal life, the life of an enduring relationship with him and his Father. Although not explicitly stating that the Father, in his dealings with the Israelites, used his Son (the “Word” in his prehuman existence [John 1:1]), Paul may have had this thought in mind when saying that the “rock was the Christ.” (10:4)

All of the Israelites had been highly favoured, being baptized into Moses and thereafter partaking of divinely provided food and drink, but most of them lost God’s approval and perished in the wilderness. (10:5) With the exception of Caleb, Joshua, and members of the tribe of Levi, the older generation that had left Egypt did not enter the Promised Land but died in the wilderness. (Numbers 26:57-65; 32:11, 12)

Verses 6-15 The warning

Developments among the Israelites served as “types” or examples, providing a warning to believers who had been baptized into one greater than Moses, the unique Son of God. By reason of their faith in Jesus Christ, they had become partakers of true spiritual food and drink. This did not mean they could be careless. Rather, they needed to be diligent in avoiding the kind of actions that caused the Israelites to lose God’s approval. (10:6)

In the wilderness, the Israelites began to desire bad things. They complained about not having the meat and other food they had enjoyed while in Egypt. Then, when quail in abundance flew into the camp, the people manifested wanton craving and killed more birds than they could possibly have eaten. (Numbers 11:4, 31-34; Psalm 106:14) A similar danger of giving in to a desire for bad faced the Corinthian believers. They may have looked back on their previous life, complaining about missing out on the sumptuous banquets associated with idolatrous practices. They needed to resist any desire for the tempting morsels. (10:6)

The Corinthians should have been on guard against idolatry, remembering what happened to the Israelites shortly after they left Egypt. As part of the festivities associated with the veneration of a golden calf, they seated themselves “to eat and drink” and then “got up to play.” (Exodus 32:6; see the Notes section.) The Corinthians needed to resist any longing for idolatrous feasting and the entertainment associated with the festivities. (10:7)

Sexual immorality proved to be a common feature of idolatry. At the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth, hundreds of temple prostitutes offered their services. In the case of the Israelites shortly before entering the Promised Land, many of the men, in connection with religious rites, were lured into having sexual relations with Moabite and Midianite women. As a result, 23,000 men perished in one day. (Numbers 25:1, 2, 5; see the Notes section.) In view of the environment in which the Corinthians found themselves, they had good reason to take seriously the warning example the Israelite men provided. (10:8)

Paul urged the Corinthians to avoid improper “testing.” Numerous manuscripts read, “Neither should we put the Christ to the test, as some of them tested him, and were destroyed by the serpents.” (10:9)

Instead of “Christ,” other manuscripts say “Lord” or “God.” Either “Lord” or “God” can be understood to refer to the Father, but “Christ” cannot. In the wilderness, the Israelites improperly tested God, murmuring with words that

implied that he could not care for them. Subsequent to this challenging of divine power to supply their needs, many of the Israelites were bitten by poisonous serpents and died. (Numbers 21:5, 6)

If “Christ” is the original reading in 1 Corinthians 10:9, possibly Paul used the term “Christ” or “anointed one” in the general sense. The Israelites spoke against God and Moses. So, in the case of the Israelites, the “anointed one” would have been Moses, whereas Jesus Christ” would have been the “anointed one” for the Corinthian believers. Another possibility is that the apostle regarded the Son of God as the one through whom the Father acted and so could speak of the Israelites as having tested Christ. For the Corinthians to speak resentfully of what they no longer were able to enjoy and to imply that they were worse off than formerly would have constituted an improper testing. It was imperative for them to shun any testing of this nature.

Paul admonished the Corinthians to avoid murmuring. In the wilderness, the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron, claiming that they had killed God’s people when divine judgment had been expressed against Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Consequently, many Israelites perished by the “destroyer” or a divinely sent plague. (Numbers 16:1-49) Among the Corinthians, there were those who murmured against Paul, the divinely chosen apostle, and there may also have been a measure of murmuring about limitations the new way of life as disciples of Christ had imposed on them. Whatever improper murmuring existed should have been stopped. (10:10)

In an effort to aid the Corinthians to benefit from the warning example of the Israelites, Paul pointed out that these things were written to “instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have arrived.” With the coming of Christ, a new age or era would dawn, bringing an end to everything associated with the world of sin that existed in past ages. For the Corinthians to share in the blessings of the age to come, they could not afford to disregard the warning lessons from Israelite history. (10:11)

Events from this history demonstrated that proud self-assurance had no place among believers. Those who imagine themselves to be standing should watch out that they do not fall. One should not presume on an approved standing with God and Christ, becoming careless regarding one’s conduct instead of remaining vigilant concerning upright living. (10:12)

The temptations the Israelites faced in the wilderness were those common to human experience and not of a nature that only angels could successfully resist. Likewise, whatever temptations the Corinthian believers had encountered

proved to be like those which humans commonly have. Nevertheless, the Corinthians were not left without any assistance to deal with temptations. “God is faithful,” dependable, or trustworthy, providing what is needed to remain loyal to him. Paul added, “He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength but, with the temptation, he will make the way out so that you may be able to endure.” The “way out” would come in the form of essential divine aid to avoid giving in to the pressure of the temptation, making it possible to endure as faithful servants of God and Christ. (10:13)

For the Corinthians, temptations were closely linked to idolatry. Understandably, therefore, Paul urged these beloved fellow believers to “flee from idolatry,” quickly getting away from it as one would from any serious danger. (10:14)

The apostle addressed the Corinthians as persons in possession of wisdom or discernment, capable of making proper evaluations. He invited them to judge what he said and then referred to aspects associated with the Lord’s supper, with a focus on shunning idolatry. (10:15)

10:16-33. The Lord’s Supper



Verses 16-22. Fellowship at the Lord’s Table

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing of the blood of the Christ? The [loaf of] bread that we break, is it not a sharing of the body of the Christ? Because [there is] one [loaf of] bread, we, the many, are one body, for all [of us] partake from the one [loaf of] bread.” When drinking from the cup containing the wine and over which a blessing had been said, believers revealed themselves to be “sharers of the blood of the Christ.” They were beneficiaries of the new

covenant that Christ had put into effect by means of his blood and which covenant made forgiveness of sins possible. On the basis of Christ's sacrificial death, believers came to be members of his composite body, the body of which he is the head. Their partaking of the one loaf, breaking the unleavened bread to eat it, proved to be concrete evidence of this reality. All present for the occasion partook of just one loaf of bread, indicating that the "many" were just one composite body. (10:16, 17)

Developing the point about the sharing, communion, or joint participation as it related to the "body of Christ" and the "blood of Christ," Paul called attention to the Jewish temple service and idolatrous sanctuary service. He wanted the Corinthians to "look" at or consider "Israel according to the flesh," or natural Israel (descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Those who ate of the sacrifices were "sharers of the altar." They were joint participants in a communal meal consisting of the portion that had been placed on the altar and the part of the sacrifice they ate. Thus, through the one sacrifice in which a group shared, they had communion with the altar, which was regarded as God's table. Accordingly, the worshipers could be viewed as having table fellowship with God as partakers of the same sacrificial victim. (10:18)

When it came to the sacrificial services at non-Jewish temples, something similar occurred. The apostle, though, wanted to make it clear that he was not attributing a real existence to the deities to whom sacrifices were being made. He continued, "What, then, am I saying? That food offered to idols is anything? Or that an idol is anything?" His rhetorical questions imply that neither what is offered to an idol nor the idol itself has any any significance or validity. No change was produced in any food offered to an idol, and the idol itself was just an object that human hands had fashioned. It was neither a real deity nor the representation of an existing god or goddess.

Being a veneration of nonexistent deities, idolatry is a counterfeit substitute for worship of the true God. It is a falsehood and an alternative option for worship that serves the interests of the powers of darkness. Idolatry stands in opposition to the only true God. For this reason, participation in idolatrous rights would constitute a sharing with demons or malevolent spirits. Therefore, as Paul expressed matters, the things sacrificed were not offered to God, but to demons, and the apostle did not want the Corinthians to become sharers with the demons. The Corinthian believers could become such if they were to involve themselves in participating in an idolatrous feast. (10:20)

Paul stressed to the Corinthians that, as believers, they could not drink of the "cup of the Lord" and also the "cup of demons," nor could they be partaking of

the “table of the Lord” and also the “table of demons.” (10:21) Participants at the idolatrous feasts drank wine from cups or bowls and ate food that had been offered to idols. For believers to have become active participants in the idolatrous feasts would have meant drinking from the “cup of demons” and partaking of the “table of demons.” This would have been inconsistent with their observance of the Lord’s supper, partaking of the wine and the unleavened bread in remembrance of his death and what it meant for them.

Paul raised the questions, “Are we inciting the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than he is, [are we]?” Believers have been bought with Christ’s precious blood, and are his servants. They owe him the honour and obedience that he deserves as their Lord. In thus honouring him and living in harmony with his example and teaching, they would also honour his Father. For believers to have attributed an existence to and honoured nonexistent deities by participating in idolatrous feasts would have been an affront both to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Father. It would have been an act of disloyalty or one provoking a justified jealousy for what rightly belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Such an inciting to jealousy would have been a foolhardy act of daring, for the Lord is the far stronger party. After his resurrection from the dead, he was granted all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18) For believers to have incited the Lord Jesus Christ to jealousy would also have constituted a provoking of his Father, the Most High God, to jealousy, resulting in becoming objects of divine anger. (10:22)

Verses 23-33 The law of love and Christian liberty

The Rite of the Lord’s Supper (KJV)

23: For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24: And when he had given thanks (*the minister Word and Sacrament gives thanks, and says*), he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25: After the same manner also he took the cup, (*the minister of Word and Sacrament continues saying*) when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26: For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27: Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29: For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30: For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31: For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32: But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

33: Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

34: And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

(The bread and the wine in remembrance of the Lord's suffering, death and resurrection is now distributed in the assembly of believers, the faithfulls. The rite ends with a hymn as found in Mathew 26:30). This is the short version of the Holy Eucharist (Lord's Supper), but the most biblical.)

Continuing with comments about eating, the apostle reiterated a principle that he had expressed earlier (6:22), “Everything is lawful, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is lawful, but not everything builds up.” Just because a certain act is not in itself wrong does not make it right in every situation. It may not prove to be beneficial, advantageous, or helpful in its impact on others. Instead of having a wholesome effect, one that strengthens observers to do what is right and proper, it could embolden them to take an injurious course of action or to condemn as a wrongdoer the one who had made inconsiderate use of his Christian freedom. (10:23)

For this reason, believers needed to think about the effect their actions could have on others. They should not seek their own advantage or what they might personally prefer or have the right to do. (10:24)

When it came to buying meat at the meat or food market (*mákellon*), believers could purchase whatever they might desire. The *mákellon* may not necessarily have been a place where only meat was sold, and not all of the meat would have been previously offered to an idol. Scrupulous Jews, with a sensitive conscience respecting defilement, doubtless would have asked about the source of the meat before deciding to buy it. The Corinthian believers, however, could eat whatever they may have bought without having made any previous inquiry on account of their conscience, “for” (as Paul continued with a quotation from Psalm 24:1 [23:1, LXX]) “the Lord’s [is] the earth and its fullness.” In the Hebrew text, the divine name (YHWH) is found. Accordingly, in this quotation of the extant Greek text, “Lord” refers to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Creator, God owns the earth and everything that exists in it. The presentation of food to a lifeless idol that represented a nonexistent deity did not change that reality. (10:25, 26)

Upon coming to be believers, the Corinthians still had family ties and other relationships with unbelievers that remained intact. If an unbeliever invited them for a meal and they wanted to accept the invitation, there was no reason for them not to do so. At the homes of unbelievers, believers could eat whatever might have been served. For conscience’ sake, they did not need to inquire about the source of the meat, recognizing that everything belonged to God and that they partook of the meal as a provision from him. (10:27)

If, though, someone disclosed that the meat had previously been part of a sacrifice to an idol, the believer would have a reason not to eat it. This would not be on account of the believer’s own conscience but that of the one who had made the disclosure. Paul did not indicate whether the one speaking up would be a believer or an unbeliever. In the case of an unbeliever, the believer’s eating could suggest that he was joining approvingly in an idolatrous act. A fellow believer with a weak conscience, on the other hand, could be prompted to eat the meat with the feelings of previous conditioning to idolatrous banqueting and be afterward pained by a guilty conscience. There is also a possibility that the believer with a weak conscience would refrain from eating the meat and come to regard the one eating as having committed sin. (10:28)

Once a question was raised regarding the meat, the believer had to consider the conscience of others. It was not, as Paul continued, a matter of the believer’s own conscience, “but that of the other.” (10:29)

The apostle then raised two questions. “For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I am partaking with thanks, why should I be blasphemed for what I am giving thanks?” It appears that Paul’s meaning is that

he would not do something that he had every right to do if it could result in others judging or condemning him on the basis of their conscience. He endeavoured to avoid having others pass judgment on his freedom as a disciple of God's Son. When he thanked God for the provision of food before him, he did not want to be blasphemed or denounced as a sinner who had engaged in an act of idolatry. (10:29, 30)

The use of Christian freedom should always be governed by what will contribute to the glory of God. To the extent possible, believers should earnestly strive to avoid any action that has the potential for bringing reproach on God from those who observe their conduct. Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Whether you are eating, whether you are drinking, whether you are doing anything else, do all things for God's glory." In every aspect of life, the believer's objective should be to safeguard and magnify the reputation of God through praiseworthy conduct. (10:31)

Pointing to his own example, the apostle urged the Corinthians, "Do not become a cause for stumbling to Jews and to Greeks and to the congregation of God [the community of believers which belongs to God, having been purchased with the blood of his own Son], as I am pleasing everyone in everything, not seeking my own [advantage], but that of the many, so that they might be saved." (10:32, 33)

Both fellow believers and unbelievers should be shown consideration, with love and compassion guiding one's conduct in relation to them and their limitations. In matters that do not involve one's loyalty to God and Christ, every effort should be made to treat the conscientious feelings of others with respect and to avoid giving needless offense. Paul set the example in this, not insisting on his rights, but recommending himself to the consciences of all. He was concerned about their eternal future and so put the interests of the many ahead of his own, doing so in the hope that they would respond favourably to the message about the Son of God, be forgiven of their sins, and be saved or delivered from the consequences of sin. (10:32, 33)

Notes:

The quotation in 1 Corinthians 10:7 reads the same as the extant Septuagint text of Exodus 32:6.

In Numbers 25:9, the number who died is given as 24,000. According to 1 Corinthians 10:8, 23,000 fell in one day. One possible explanation is that 23,000 were understood to have perished from the plague, whereas 1,000 of the

prominent instigators (chieftains of the people) were not included because of having been executed earlier. (Numbers 25:4)

Paul's reference (in 10:17) to the "body" as being composed of "many" indicates that the community of believers constitutes Christ's body. A prayer contained in the Didache (thought to date from the late first or early second century) likewise associates the composite body of the community of believers with the loaf of bread from which all partake. "We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant. To you [be] the glory for eternity. As this broken bread was dispersed on the mountains and gathered to become one, thus may your congregation be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom." (9:3, 4) The scattering or dispersing "on the mountains" appears to refer to the sowing of seed in hilly or mountainous regions, with the harvested grain from many ears being ground into flour and coming to be just one loaf of bread. In like manner, widely scattered believers come to be just one composite body on the basis of what Christ has done for them through his sacrificial death.

A number of translations render Paul's questions (10:29, 30) as an objection to his admonition to show consideration for the conscience of others. "But why, you ask, should my freedom be judged by someone else's conscience? If I eat the meal with thankfulness, why am I criticized because of something for which I thank God?" (NCV) "Now why should my freedom to eat be at the mercy of someone else's conscience? Or why should an evil be said of me when I have eaten meat with thankfulness, and have thanked God for it?" (J. B. Phillips) "'What?' you say. 'Is my freedom to be called in question by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I blamed for eating food over which I have said grace?'" (REB) The answer to the objection would then be, Because all things should be done to God's glory, which requires showing consideration for the conscience of others and seeking to avoid putting a stumbling block in their way.

The context in which the questions are placed, however, does not introduce them as an objection. So it appears more likely that Paul meant to continue speaking of himself in the first person as an example to the Corinthians of what he chose to prevent from taking place. He wanted to avoid having his use of freedom condemned and his partaking of food with thanks denounced as sinful.

1 Corinthians 11:1-34

11: 1-16 The church and its women

Verses 1-10 The headship of the man

With apparent reference to his being willing to forgo his own rights for the good of others, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to become imitators of him, as he was of Christ. In coming to the earth and laying down his life for humankind, the Son of God revealed the greatness of his love for humans, doing so at great cost to himself in order for them to be delivered from the condemnation of sin and to be reconciled to his Father, provided they responded in faith to him and what he had done for them. Jesus Christ did not please himself but chose to follow a course that would result in the greatest good possible for humankind. (11:1)

At this point, Paul directed attention to other matters. He first praised or commended the Corinthians for having remembered him in everything and adhered to the “traditions” he had passed on to them. “Everything” or “all” is here to be understood in a general sense. Basically, the Corinthians had kept Paul’s teaching in mind and had followed the customary ways or procedures for conduct within the community of believers as he had made these known to them. (11:2) Nevertheless, problems had arisen, and Paul either learned about these from members of Chloe’s household (1:11) or from Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17).

The apostle started his corrective admonition with a basic principle regarding headship. He wanted the Corinthians to “know,” recognize, or keep in mind that Christ is the head of every man, that the man is the head of woman, and that God is the head of Christ. If Paul meant to include all men, Christ is their head from the standpoint of his having bought the entire human race with his precious blood. He is the Master, Lord, or Owner, the one whom believing men recognize as their head. In the family, the head is the man, husband, or father. As the Son and the Word through whom the Father made known his will, Christ is subordinate. His Father is the preeminent one or his head. (11:3)

In his own family, the man, husband, or father is not subordinate to or under the authority of another human. As a disciple of God’s Son, a man would be filling his proper role with reference to his spiritual life when praying or prophesying. The prophesying would relate primarily to conveying God’s will to others and not necessarily foretelling future events (which aspect was not the main feature of prophecy). Therefore, in his divinely designated role, a man would “disgrace

“his head” when covering it while praying or prophesying. Whereas “head” could refer to the man’s own physical head, it is more likely to designate Christ, the one whom Paul had identified as the “head” of the man. (11:4)

In the Greek text of verse 4, there is no word meaning “covering.” The term preceding “head” is the preposition *katá*, which in this context means “down” and suggests that a covering would be hanging down from the head. Whether the man might cover his head by pulling the upper part of his garment over his head or using a separate piece of cloth is not revealed in the account. If a man were to cover his head, he would be concealing his divinely designated role. By this deliberate act, he would imply that he (either on account of shame or fear) did not want to function in this role and reflect the image of God. As a member of Christ’s body, a believing man would thereby shame Christ as his head. He would be refusing to imitate the Son of God who delights in always reflecting his Father’s image flawlessly.

Paul’s comments about a man are more likely to have been a hypothetical example and not representative of actual cases in the community of believers. This appears to be evident from the fact that the apostle primarily addressed the disregard of established custom by women in the congregation.

“Every woman, however, who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head.” When assuming a role that would be the prerogative of a husband or a father and violating the existing standard of propriety, a woman would be disgracing the man, usurping his place as one who is divinely responsible for manifesting God’s glory or majesty. While it could be said that she would also be bringing shame upon herself or upon her own head, the more likely meaning is that she would be disgracing the man, either the husband or the father. If a woman disrespectfully refused to cover her head as an indication of her rightful place, she might as well have all her hair cut off. (11:5)

“But if,” Paul continued, it would be “disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaved,” then she should cover her head. For women in the first century to have appeared publicly as shorn or shaved would have been unthinkable. They would have been ashamed to do so. Even today most women choose to conceal extensive hair loss or baldness. They are uncomfortable about being seen as bald. Many men, on the other hand, choose to shave off all their hair and have no qualms about their bald appearance. In view of the way in which women commonly regarded their hair, it logically followed that they would cover their heads when praying or prophesying, differentiating themselves from the men who, with uncovered heads, prayed or prophesied. (11:6)

As to why a man should not cover his head and a woman should do so, Paul continued, “The man is God’s image and glory, but the woman [is] man’s glory.” In the family, a husband or father is not subordinate to a human head. He is the head of his household. Accordingly, in this role, he can reflect the image and majesty of God, for the heavenly Father is supreme and in no way subject to anyone else. In the case of a woman, the situation is different. As a member of the household, she has a husband or a father as her head. In her role, the woman is a glory to the man when she conducts herself in the laudable and dignified manner that brings honour to him in the eyes of others. (11:7)

Alluding to the Genesis account (2:18-22) that speaks of God as having purposed for the woman to be man’s helper and having “built” her from man’s rib, the apostle said, “Man is not out of woman, but woman [is] out of man, for also man was not created for woman but woman for man.” (11:8, 9)

Although believing men and women have an equal standing as “sons of God” by reason of their faith in Christ and what he accomplished through his death, this does not invalidate the headship arrangement in the family. Therefore, in the state of their earthly existence, women conduct themselves in a manner that reflects their role as being in a supportive position and not in a preeminent one. “Therefore, the woman should have authority on her head on account of the angels.” (11:10)

If Paul had meant that a woman’s head covering signified that she was under authority, he could have expressed this by specifically saying that she should cover her head to indicate her subjection. Because he did not do so, a possible significance may be that a woman, by covering her head, would show her recognition of her divinely ordained role, and this would authorize her to pray or prophesy in the presence of fellow believers. Instead of representing her as being under authority, the head covering would seemingly serve to show that she was maintaining her proper place as a woman with the authority to pray or prophesy. (11:10)

The Greek word *ángelos* (“angel”) can designate either a human or a heavenly messenger. So, “on account of the angels” could refer to visiting messengers or representatives from other congregations. By covering their heads, believing Corinthian women would be showing regard for these messengers by acting in harmony with accepted custom when praying or prophesying. They would not be conducting themselves in an offensive manner. If the reference is to heavenly messengers or angels, the main thought could be that women would be showing proper regard for the position of angels. These spirit persons exist on a plane that is higher than that of humans and were created in God’s image. Praying and

prophesying would be done in their presence. It would grieve the angels to observe women disregarding their proper role in matters of worship and bringing disgrace to husbands and fathers. (11:10) It appears that some of the women in Corinth had cast off all restraint, perhaps considering their spiritual equality with men as nullifying the God-ordained roles for men and women.

Possibly to avoid giving men the idea that they, in relation to women, were superior in God's eyes, Paul reminded the community of believers that, "in the Lord," the woman did not exist "without the man, and the man without the woman." At one with the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body, both men and women needed one another for mutual strengthening and encouraging as fellow children of God. (11:11)

Just as believing men and women depend on one another "in the Lord," the physical existence of men and women is not independent of one another. "The woman [is] out of the man," for the first woman was "built" from the man's rib. At the same time, all men owe their existence to women through the birthing process. Accordingly, "man is through woman." Ultimately, though, "everything is from God." He is the source of all that exists. (11:12)

Inviting the Corinthians to give consideration to what he has been discussing, Paul continued, "Judge for yourselves, Is it fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God?" The implied answer, based on what he had already stated, would be, No. (11:13)

Paul, though, added yet another reason, "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonour to him, but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her?" "Nature" or the natural sense of propriety "teaches" or makes clear that men wear or have their hair cut in a manner that markedly differs from women. The long hair style typical for women in the first-century Greco-Roman world would have been regarded as disgraceful for a man. The long hair that proved to be a "glory" for a woman—a crowning ornament of beauty—would have been dishonourable for a man. (11:14, 15)

When referring to a woman's long hair as having been given her instead of a "wraparound," Paul seems to have meant that a woman's long hair was God's gift to her, functioning like a beautiful garment. Custom dictated that this splendid natural covering not to be treated in a manner that would reflect unfavourably on its being a glory to the woman. If she acted contrary to her divinely appointed role, refusing to cover her head when praying or prophesying in the presence of fellow believers, she would detract from the glory or splendour of her long hair. (11:15)

Verses 11-16. Order under grace

Paul acknowledged that there may have been those who had a different view and would not be persuaded by what he had written. He, though, was unwilling to argue the point, saying “we have no such custom [other than what he had set forth], nor do the congregations of God.” In all the other communities of believers, women who prayed or prophesied did so with covered heads. Therefore, believers in Corinth had no basis for introducing an innovation that Paul could not support and for which not a single precedent existed in any other congregation. (11:16)

11:17-34. Disorders at the Lord’s Supper rebuked

Verses 17-22. The disorder exposed.

The apostle next addressed a more serious problem that had arisen regarding table fellowship and the Lord’s Supper. On account of the abuses that had come into existence, Paul could not praise or commend the Corinthians. The situation had deteriorated to the point where their meeting together did more harm than good, for they assembled not for “the better but for the worse.” (11:17)

According to reports that had reached the apostle, divisions existed among the Corinthians when they met as a congregation. Seemingly aware that what one might hear is not as authoritative as firsthand knowledge, he added that, “to an extent,” he believed what he had heard. (11:18)

Based on what he did know, Paul concluded that a divisive party spirit had come into existence and so could say to them, “For there must also be factions among you.” The existence of such factions would reveal who among them were approved or who in their midst did not identify themselves with a particular faction but demonstrated themselves to be exclusively attached to Jesus Christ as Lord. (11:19)

Whenever the Corinthians partook of the Lord’s “supper” (*deípnon*), their unity as members of Christ’s body and beloved fellow children of God should have been in evidence. This, though, was not the case when they assembled. The existing factions and abuses revealed that they were not eating the Lord’s supper. Their actions were contrary to the purpose for which the Lord Jesus Christ had instituted its observance. (11:20)

The Greek term *deípnon* designates the main meal of the day and was commonly eaten in the evening. As part of this meal, believers partook of the unleavened bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus’ death and what it

accomplished for them. So it appears that the entire meal was regarded as the Lord's supper.

In connection with this meal, a loveless spirit had developed among the Corinthians. They did not share food with everyone and, in fact, did not wait for all to arrive before beginning to eat. Slaves who had little control over when they might be free to leave to go to someone else's home would have been among the latecomers. They and other poor members of the congregation would have benefited most from being able to enjoy a meal with fellow believers. Yet, without any regard for those in need or those who were no part of their particular faction, the ones with an abundance of food and drink began to eat their own supper. Possibly to indicate that those who ate their own meals had ample for sharing, Paul referred to one person as being "drunk" while another continued to be hungry. (11:21)

If the ones who ate their own meals were so hungry that they just could not wait for others, they, as Paul reminded them by means of a question, had their own homes in which they could eat and drink. He continued, "Or do you despise the congregation of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" All believers were part of the congregation or community that belonged to God and that had been purchased with the precious blood of his own Son. To treat any fellow believer in a loveless manner would have constituted a contemptuous attitude toward those whom the heavenly Father and his Son deeply loved. For believers to humiliate poor fellow children of God by letting them remain hungry proved to be a horrific violation of Jesus' command to love as he had loved. Paul must have been deeply troubled by the disturbing reports, prompting him to say, "Shall I praise you? In this, I do not praise [you]." (11:22)

Verses 23-34. The disorder corrected.

The apostle was not responsible for the problems that had developed among the Corinthians. When he was with them, he had imparted to them what he had received from the Lord. On the night Jesus was handed over, "he took a [loaf of] bread, and [upon] giving thanks, broke [it], and said, 'This is my body for you. Do this for a remembrance of me.' Likewise [he took] also the cup after the meal, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink, for a remembrance of me.'" (11:23-25)

Paul had not been personally present for this occasion. His reference to receiving the specifics from the Lord suggests that he must have had a direct revelation from Jesus Christ in order to speak authoritatively about the event.

The handing over may refer to the betrayal of Judas, which led to Jesus' arrest, trial, and subsequent execution. (11:23)

During the night Jesus was with the apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem and eating the Passover meal, he used unleavened bread and a cup of wine to institute an observance that all of his disciples were to continue. To distribute the unleavened bread, Jesus broke it after he had said a blessing. (11:24)

The Greek word for "bread" (*ártos*) is masculine, but the word for "this" (*toúto*; "this is my body") is neuter, raising a question about whether the bread is actually being linked to Christ's body of flesh. (11:24) One explanation for the neuter is that "this" reflects the neuter gender of the word for "body" (*sóma*). From a strict grammatical standpoint, however, the word for "this" should be masculine to establish a direct relationship of the bread to the fleshy body of God's Son.

Earlier (in 10:17), Paul spoke of the body as being the community of believers. The corporate "body" of which Christ is the head may also be the main focus of the words, "This is my body." By surrendering his life, Jesus made it possible for the corporate body of many members to come into existence, and the individual members benefit from this body and its head. In that sense, the "body" could be understood to be "for" the believers. (11:24)

The primary aim of Paul's letter was to provide corrective admonition rather than an exposition on the precise meaning of Jesus' words. The apostle's response to developments among the Corinthians was directed to them as a community of believers or as members of the body of Christ. This provides a basis for concluding that Paul's references to the "body" mainly relate to the corporate body of believers and not to the fleshy body of Christ.

Other ancient manuscript readings, however, do not support understanding the "body" to be the community of believers. These manuscripts contain an expanded text, "This is my body being broken for you." It could not be said that the body of believers was broken for the individual members, but the physical body of Christ was "broken" when he died sacrificially. This did result in benefits for his disciples. It made possible their being forgiven of sins and coming into an approved standing with God as his children on the basis of their faith in Christ and what he had accomplished.

The apostles who actually heard Jesus' words would not have understood that, in some way, a transformation had taken place in the bread itself, for he was in their midst as a human. If, then, the focus is on Jesus' own body, the neuter

“this” (*toúto*) could signify that what Jesus did in breaking the bread and giving it to the apostles indicated that he would offer his own body for them. Based on what actually resulted when Jesus died sacrificially, one could say that the bread serves to bring to remembrance that he offered his body of flesh and that this brought a body of believers into existence. Jesus’ own body, which he surrendered for the world of mankind, and the corporate body of which he is the head have proved to be for the benefit of believers individually. (Compare Ephesians 4:11-13.) When partaking of the bread, believers do so in remembrance of Jesus, appreciatively acknowledging what he has done for them.

“After the eating [of the meal; *deipnéo*],” Jesus took the cup, said a blessing, and then passed the cup to the apostles. (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23) The word *deipnéo* is the verb form of the noun *deípnon*, which designates the main meal of the day. The common view is that after the apostles had finished the Passover meal and eaten the broken pieces of the unleavened bread, Jesus immediately introduced the cup of wine. This, though, is not necessarily the case. The Son of God may have started the actual meal by breaking the bread and handing it to his disciples. This would have followed the pattern of what is known about ancient Jewish custom. The head of the household or the host, before the start of the meal, said a prayer, broke the bread, and then distributed it. Whether this is what Jesus did cannot be determined from the preserved accounts. What is clear, however, is that the partaking of the bread and the wine was linked to a meal, and this continued to be the case when first-century believers met in homes for spiritual fellowship. (11:25)

The cup of wine represented what Jesus would accomplish in putting the new covenant in force on the basis of his shed blood. This “new covenant” is referred to as being “in the blood,” for without the pouring out of Jesus’ blood there would have been no new covenant. His blood proved to be the element that put the new covenant in force and, therefore, in which its benefits resided. The words about the cup confirm that no transformation is to be understood as having taken place in the case of the unleavened bread. The actual cup of wine could not be spoken of as being the new covenant, the validation of which occurred on the basis of Christ’s precious blood. Since the verb “is,” which expresses the relationship of the cup to the new covenant, does not mean actual identification with this covenant, the “is” would likewise not require a transformation of the bread in a manner that would equate it with Christ’s actual physical body. When drinking from the cup of wine, believers would be doing so in remembrance of Jesus. They would be reminded of the fact that, based on what he did for them when shedding his precious blood, they had become fellow sharers in the new covenant, which included being forgiven of sins and

participating in all other privileges and blessings this covenant made possible. (11:25)

While some have concluded that Jesus instituted an annual observance because of its association with the annual Passover, Paul's words to the Corinthians do not support this. The opening word of verse 26 is *hosákis*, a term common in ancient Greek writings and meaning "whenever," "as many times as," and "as often as." The same word is found in Revelation 11:6, where the reference is to "whenever" the two witnesses chose to use the authority that had been granted to them. (See the Notes section.) Accordingly, whenever the Corinthians assembled and partook of the bread and the wine, they proclaimed the death of their Lord for them. It was a tangible reminder of his death and everything that he accomplished thereby. Paul's words indicate that believers would continue to make this tangible proclamation of the Lord's death until he would arrive in glory. His approved followers would then be united to him in changed glorified bodies as had those who immediately preceded them upon rising from the dead. (11:26; compare 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.)

Those eating of the unleavened loaf and drinking of the cup of the Lord unworthily would make themselves guilty respecting the body and blood of the Lord. The Corinthian believers who failed to show love for their disadvantaged brothers, not waiting for them to share in the meal, did eat unworthily. When excluding fellow believers from participating with them in the table fellowship, they sinned against members of the body of Christ. The Corinthians who acted in a loveless manner made themselves guilty respecting Christ's blood, for they acted contrary to the purpose for which he died. With his precious blood, all believers had been purchased and cleansed from sin, leading to their having an approved standing as God's beloved children. For anyone to humiliate fellow believers, treating them as undeserving of love and compassion, constituted a denial of the efficacy of Christ's blood. Such hateful action made it appear that his blood had not rendered all believers as acceptable members of God's beloved family. What is done to the members of Christ's body is done to him as the head. So those guilty of hateful action would have placed themselves in the same position as those who were responsible for Jesus' death. (11:27)

In view of the seriousness of what had taken place among the Corinthians, they needed to "test," "prove" or "examine" themselves, determining whether they were in the right condition to partake of the unleavened bread and the wine. The implication is that, if they recognized the error of their ways, they needed to repent and change, asking fellow believers against whom they had sinned for forgiveness. After the self-testing and making sure that they could partake of the

Lord's supper in a worthy manner would it be right for them to "eat of the bread and drink from the cup." (11:28)

Those who ate and drank without discerning "the body" ("the body of the Lord," according to other manuscripts) would be eating and drinking judgment against themselves. They would merit condemnation. The words "without discerning the body" could be understood in three basic ways: (1) not differentiating between common food and the bread and the wine used in the observance, (2) not eating with a proper appreciation for what the Lord Jesus Christ did when laying down his life sacrificially, and (3) failing to recognize all believers as part of the body and not treating them as beloved members of that body. The apostle's focus on the corporate body of believers and the abuses he mentioned suggest that the third meaning is the preferable one. Among the Corinthians, a significant number had failed to discern that all associated were members of Christ's body and that they were obligated to treat them with the kind of love that Jesus had shown when laying down his life in sacrifice. (11:29)

The loveless spirit certain ones among the Corinthians had shown was spiritually destructive. It also seems to have affected the physical well-being of the congregation, for Paul specifically linked the failure to discern the body with what had happened in their midst. "Therefore, many of you are weak and sick, and a considerable number have fallen asleep." This suggests that quite a few of the Corinthian believers were physically ill and a disproportionate number had fallen asleep in death. Lack of love is death dealing. (11:30)

For the Corinthians to avoid adverse judgment, they needed to examine themselves and take any required corrective action. As Paul continued, "But if we examine ourselves, we will not be judged." (11:31)

It appears that Paul regarded the weakness, illness, and death as expressions of the Lord's judgment. Being the congregation's head, the Lord Jesus Christ does judge its members, and his judgment serves as corrective discipline. (Compare Revelation 2:20-23.) The objective of the Lord's judgment is so that the members of his body will not experience the severe judgment to come upon the world that is at enmity with his Father. (11:32)

Although there were those in Corinth who had transgressed, Paul did not reject them but addressed them as "my brothers," acknowledging them as part of his beloved family of God's children. He urged them to end the past abuses, waiting for one another before they began to eat. (11:33)

If any in their midst were so hungry that they could not wait until all arrived, they should eat at home. Then, when they came together as a congregation to eat a meal and to partake of the unleavened bread and the wine, they would not be doing so in a manner that would merit the Lord's unfavourable judgment. Their united fellowship at one table would reflect love and consideration for all and a deep appreciation for what Lord Jesus Christ had done for them. (11:34)

There were other matters that needed to be given attention, but Paul did not consider it essential to address them in this letter. He planned to deal with them personally during his next visit in Corinth. (11:34)

Notes:

The concluding part of 1 Corinthians 11:22 can be punctuated differently. “Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise [you].”

The early controversies involving Nisan 14 were not about whether there should be an annual observance of the Lord’s supper but when the fasting prior to the period linked to Jesus’ death should end. According to the Eusebius (c. 263 to c. 339 CE), Victor, the head of the church in Rome, made an issue of trying to enforce Sunday as the official day for ending the fast. This was in the second century. The “bishops” in Asia, with Polycrates taking the leading position, resisted. Eusebius wrote about the two positions (*Ecclesiastical History*, V, 23 [translated by G. A. Williamson]): “All the Asian dioceses thought that in accordance with ancient tradition they ought to observe the fourteenth day of the lunar month as the beginning of the Paschal festival — the day on which the Jews had been commanded to sacrifice the lamb: on that day, no matter which day of the week it might be, they must without fail bring the fast to an end. But nowhere else in the world was it customary to arrange their celebrations in that way: in accordance with apostolic tradition, they preserved the view which still prevails, that it was improper to end the fast on any day other than that of our Saviour’s resurrection.”

Humans tend to be traditionalists. This also weighs against the view that an established annual celebration, an anniversary, would in the course of time change to an observance that is repeated throughout the year. Traditionally, anniversaries remain fixed as anniversaries. Moreover, the fact that Paul did not consider it necessary to address other problems until he actually visited Corinth but did feel compelled to deal with the abuses that had arisen regarding the Lord’s supper points to a comparatively frequent practice. The abuses that arose within a comparatively short time after Paul left Corinth provide additional evidence about the unlikelihood of this being an annual event.

Some have thought that the words in 1 Corinthians 11:30 refer to spiritual weakness, illness, and sleep or death. This seems less likely, for spiritual states cannot be differentiated with the kind of specific terms that relate to physical conditions.

I Corinthians 12: 1-31

12:1-11. The believer and the sign of gifts

Verses 1-3. The Giver of the gifts

Paul did not wish the Corinthian believers to be in ignorance about the “spiritual [gifts].” Based on his development of the subject, he wanted them to recognize the source of these gifts and the purpose for which they had been granted. (12:1; see the Notes section.)

Corinthian believers who had been Gentiles alienated from God knew how they had conducted themselves as idolaters. They had been led as by a compelling force to speechless idols, representations of nonexistent deities. As idolaters, they had been led away like irrational animals, for their impulses and emotions, not their mental faculties, gave rise to their ecstatic or frenzied outbursts. (12:2)

In view of their past experience as idolaters, Paul wanted them to know that God’s spirit would never give rise to empty or blasphemous expressions. Under the impelling power of God’s spirit, no one would have been able to say, “Jesus [is] accursed [*anáthema*]!” God’s spirit would prompt the acknowledgment, “Jesus [is] Lord.” Without the operation of the Holy Spirit, a person would not be able to make this acknowledgment as an expression of genuine faith. (12:3)

Verses 4-11. The enumeration of the gifts.

Although a variety of spiritual gifts existed, all had the same source—God’s spirit. The spiritual gifts had been granted to function in a unified manner, with no gift working at cross-purposes with the other gifts. (12:4)

Continuing to emphasize this unity, Paul, after calling attention to the existence of a variety of services or ministries, added that there is the same Lord. The varied ministries related to looking after the material needs of fellow believers. Help had to be provided to poor widows and others who may have been impoverished on account of persecution, natural disasters, or other adversities. Those rendering varied services needed to be able to evaluate needs and to have the essential skills to render appropriate aid in an impartial manner. Through the

operation of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ enhanced the abilities of those who ministered and guided their efforts. (12:5)

There were various works, but there was only one God who was working in all who were performing a variety of tasks for the benefit of fellow believers. With the heavenly Father being the one who, by means of his spirit, furthered the accomplishment of the works in everyone, this would rule out any divisiveness or competitiveness. All works would contribute to benefit the congregation as a whole. These works could have included all operations of a miraculous nature, which operations God effects by means of his spirit and in all believers who have been granted the spiritual endowments. (12:6)

To each one, the manifestation of the spirit in the form of spiritual gifts had been given for a beneficial purpose. This indicates that believers were to use their divinely granted gifts in a manner that would contribute to the well-being of the congregation. The possession of one or more of these gifts was not to be a basis for pride. (12:7)

One believer might have the “word of wisdom” as a spiritual gift. This may have related to the ability to provide wise guidance and admonition to fellow believers. (12:8) In 2 Peter 3:15, this wisdom is attributed to Paul. “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you.”

Another believer might have “word of knowledge,” a miraculous knowledge that would not have been acquired through a process of learning and instruction. (12:8) When, for example, Ananias and Sapphira lied about the amount from the purchase price of a field they had donated for believers in need, Peter, by reason of his possession of miraculously granted knowledge, exposed their deception. (Acts 5:1-9)

Although “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” designated two distinct gifts, they were both the product of the same spirit, God’s spirit. (12:8) Likewise, one believer might have the spiritual gift of faith, whereas another believer might be endowed with the ability to heal illness and affliction. Though very different spiritual gifts, they were still a product of the one spirit of God. In this case, faith would not be the faith all believers in Christ and his Father possessed. It would be a miraculous faith or conviction that enabled the possessor to know when to take a particular course of action that would have seemed impossible but which would lead to good results. (12:9) Paul apparently referred to this faith as the kind which can move mountains or what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles. (13:2)

For a believer to have been endowed with works of power may have included the spiritual gift of being able to free others from demon possession, to raise the dead, and to restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. The gift of prophecy with which another believer may have been endowed included being able to foretell future events and to console, edify, encourage, and strengthen fellow believers by making known God's will. (12:10)

A believer with the gift to discern "spirits" would have been able to determine whether prophetic utterances originated from God or had a human or demonic source. Based on the account in Acts 2:7-11, believers who had been granted the gift of tongues were able to express themselves like native speakers in languages other than those they had learned. Those with the gift of "interpretation of tongues" would have been able to translate languages they did not personally speak. (12:10)

"The one and the same spirit" operated to empower believers to exercise this great variety of gifts. Paul attributed the possession of the gifts individual believers might have to the wishing or choosing (*boúlomai*) of the "spirit" (*pneúma*). This indicated that the gifts had been divinely granted to the possessor and did not involve the individual's personal choice. (12:11; compare Acts 8:18-20.) A similar use of the Greek word *pneúma*, with the contextual meaning of "wind," is found in John 3:8, "The wind (*pneúma*) blows where it wishes [or chooses (*thélo*)], and you hear its sound, but you do not know from where it is coming and where it is going." Although the Greek verbs *boúlomai* and *thélo* are different, they both can denote wishing or choosing but not always a choice that involves intelligent thought. (See, for example, the Septuagint rendering of Job 39:9, where *boúlomai* is used regarding an animal.)

12: 12-31. The church and the sign of gifts

Verses 12-27. The church as the body of Christ.

The physical organism, though consisting of many parts, is just one body. "So also is the Christ," meaning that the many believers who are members of Christ's body form one corporate whole. (12:12)

Including himself with all other believers, Paul stressed unity, saying, "For also in one spirit all of us were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks [representative of all non-Jews], whether slaves or free [persons], and all of us were made to drink of one spirit." Believers experienced this baptism when they received God's spirit. Upon then coming to be united to Christ as their head and members of his corporate body, they were baptized "in" or by means of one

spirit “into one body.” Neither ethnic nor social differences mattered, for God’s spirit had been imparted without distinction to all believers. This constituted them partakers of the spirit, and so they could appropriately be referred to as being made to “drink of one spirit.” (12:13)

The body itself is not one member but is made up of many parts. (12:14) This applies to both the physical body and the corporate body of Christ.

All of the members are essential for the proper functioning of the body. The foot could not say that, on account of its not being a hand, it is no part of the body. Similarly, the ear could not say that, because of its not being an eye, it is no part of the body. (12:15, 16)

The body parts depend on one another. “If the whole body [were] an eye, where [would] the [faculty of] hearing [be]? If the whole [body were the faculty of] hearing, where [would the faculty of] smelling [be]?” For the body to have the full complement of senses, the respective organs are needed. It would be seriously detrimental to the body if its function were limited solely to one organ. (12:17)

God, in keeping with his will, has placed the members in the body, with each part having an assigned function that benefits the corporate whole. (12:18) Continuing to stress the interdependence of the many body members, Paul raised a rhetorical question, “But if all [the parts] were one member, where [would] the body [be]?” One organ is not enough for a functioning body to exist. (12:19)

“Now, however, [there are] indeed [not in all manuscripts] many members, but [only] one body.” By virtue of its many parts, the body exists as a viable organism. (12:20)

Paul went on to illustrate that the parts of the body are not independent of one another. The eye is in no position to tell the hand, “I do not need you.” Even the vital head cannot say to the feet, “I do not need you.” (12:21)

In fact, as the apostle continued, the seemingly “weaker” body parts are essential, performing important functions. These weaker body members would be parts other than those like the feet, legs, hands and arms that are associated with activity and exertion. The eyes, the brain, the heart, the lungs, and various other internal organs cannot be subjected to the kind of external hazards that the feet and hands encounter on a regular basis. Whereas the amputation of a hand or a foot would not usually mean the end of life for the body, the loss of the kidneys, the lungs, the heart, the brain or various other internal organs would be fatal. (12:22)

Body parts or organs that are considered “dishonourable” or not fit for continual exposure are the very ones to which greater attention is given. Certain parts of the body customarily are covered by clothing. “We,” as Paul noted, thus surround these parts with “greater honour.” The body members that are regarded as unbecoming for exposure are the very parts that are treated with greater respect, for garments serve to conceal them from public view. The comely or attractive body parts (like the face), however, have no such need for clothing. (12:23)

God’s arrangement of the human body is such that greater honour is given to the parts or organs that appear to be lacking in attractiveness or hardiness. The internal organs are hidden from view and protected. From the standpoint of their indispensable role in the continuance of life, the major internal organs have been assigned greater honour. Without the functions they perform, the body could not continue to live. (12:24)

On account of the way in which God has arranged the human body, there is no division in the organism, but all the parts are interconnected. Paul referred to these body parts as having the “same concern for one another. And when one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it. When one member is glorified, all the other members rejoice with it.” A pain in one part of the body affects the whole organism. The noteworthy accomplishment of one member brings joy to the whole body. Acknowledgment of good work done with the hands, for example, may be regarded as “glorifying” or praising them. For the individual, the expressions of commendation contribute to joy and satisfaction. In this manner, the whole body rejoices with the glorified member. (12:25, 26)

Making an application to the Corinthian believers, Paul continued, “But you are Christ’s body and members from a part.” There is no definite article preceding the Greek expression “body of Christ.” This may be significant, for the Corinthians did not make up the whole body of Christ but, as a community of believers, were part of that body. While numerous translations have rendered the literal Greek (“members out of part”) as meaning that the Corinthian believers were individually members of the body of Christ, it may be preferable to understand the words to reflect the actual situation. Individually they were part of a part of a far greater whole that formed the complete body of Christ. (12:27)

Verses 28-31; The church and the sign gifts.

It is in the entire community of believers or in the body of Christ that God has set, placed, or appointed the members with their respective functions for the benefit of all. “First [are] apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then [works

of] power; then gifts of healing; [means of] helping; leadership [abilities], [various] kinds of tongues.” (12:28)

In the case of the twelve apostles, they were in position to provide firsthand testimony concerning the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. As the divinely appointed apostle to the non-Jewish nations, Paul had received special revelations from the Son of God. Prophets, though at times foretelling future events, primarily made known God’s will, admonishing and encouraging fellow believers. Teachers provided instruction and imparted the knowledge believers needed to live in harmony with their identity as God’s beloved children. Works of power included the expelling of demons, raising the dead, and restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. Gifts of healing related to bringing relief to the sick and afflicted. Means of helping (literally, “helps”) probably included all arrangements for providing aid to those in need. The expression “leadership abilities” is a rendering of the plural form of *kybérnesis*, which term refers to leading, administering, directing, or managing. One function could have been the ability to arrange for and direct relief efforts. Last came the miraculously imparted ability to speak in languages that one had not learned. (12:28)

According to the divine arrangement, the greatest gifts are those that lead to the upbuilding and strengthening of the community of believers as a whole. These gifts also require the use of the conscious mental faculties in cooperating with the leading of God’s spirit and require the greatest personal effort. (12:28; see the Notes section.)

By means of rhetorical questions, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that not all were apostles, not all were prophets, not all were teachers, not all performed deeds of power, not all did healing, not all spoke in tongues, and not all translated tongues (languages they had not previously learned). He admonished them to strive for the greater gifts. Nevertheless, he wanted to show them the surpassing, superior, or more excellent way, and that way was the way of love, a selfless compassionate care and concern for the welfare of others. (12:29-31)

Among the Corinthians, the speaking in tongues had been overemphasized. So it appears that the greater gifts, such as prophesying and teaching, were not allowed to be expressed fully. These latent greater gifts or endowments should have been zealously sought. They were not to be permitted to atrophy but to be used to the full for the benefit of the congregation. (12:31)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, the term for “spiritual things” (the plural form of *pneumatikós*) can also designate “spiritual persons.” There is a possibility that the reference is to persons who possessed the spiritual gifts instead of the spiritual gifts themselves. In that case, Paul wanted the possessors of the gifts to recognize their source and their rightful use for the benefit of the community of believers.

The listing of the gifts (12:28) places the speaking in tongues last. Among the Corinthians, the use of this gift resulted in disruptive emotional outbursts, with various ones speaking at the same time. (14:5, 23, 27) The problem this brought about in the Corinthian congregation illustrates what can happen when the value of certain gifts, including those that require real effort, are minimized or denigrated. Care needs to be exercised to treat all fellow believers as valued members of Christ’s body. While some may not be as prominent as hands and feet in visibility and activity, they may, by their loving compassion and concern, perform vital functions comparable to the internal organs of the human body, benefiting the community in many unobservable ways.

Judgments mentioned in Sacred Scripture

I have heard many friends from both my faith and opposing faiths speaking about judgment as described in the Bible. Some speak of it freely with assurance of salvation to those who want to escape from it. Others do not even want to have anything to do with judgment for it is just a state of mind. Others claim that judgment is just a Christian gimmick to instil fear in people so that they should accept the faith. Some Christians say that judgment is now and we are living in it, while others say that it will come after the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every one of them speaks with assurance and with references from the Bible. There is only one thing missing in most of these Christians; they do not know which judgment is being discussed in which circumstance. Six people may speak of judgment at the same time but totally different judgment all together. A careful inductive study of the Bible shows that there are seven well-defined judgments appearing in the scriptures. This is in contrast with the concept of single general judgment that refuses to sustain at all. Let us have a look at these judgments in brief:

- 1. GOD’S JUDGMENT OF SIN:** When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, the world and sin was judged and Satan was defeated. This act was

prophesied by David in Psalms 22:124. Its fulfilment in the New Testament is mentioned in 1Corinthians 15:3, Hebrews 9:26-28, 1Peter 2:24; 3:18 and in John 12:31. Christ bore our sins so that we should live unto righteousness. This judgment is passed.

2. **BELIEVERS SELF JUDGMENT:** In confessing and forsaking sins committed a believer judges sin and is thus, avoiding the chastisement from the heavenly Father. Unconfessed sin invites chastisement from God (Hebrews 12:7, 1Cor.5:5; 11:31-32). As believers, we are called to judge ourselves so that we cannot be judged. We are to examine ourselves as to whether our faith is properly placed in Christ. The Father's chastisement is that which drives us to repentance. This judgment is not over until our total transformation of the body. It is being carried by believers day by day.
3. **CHRIST'S JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS:** According to Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, every believer will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged of his or her works done on earth as a believer, whether it be good or bad. This will not be the judgment of sin, but rather of our motivation and faithfulness or stewardship (1 Cor.3:11-15). Gain or loss of rewards will be the result. This judgment will take place soon after the second appearance of Christ (1 Cor.4:1-5, 2Tim. 4:8) Non-believers have no part in this judgment.
4. **JUDGMENT OF ALL THE UNSAVED:** This is often called '*The Great White Throne Judgment*' (Rev.20:11), which is the final judgment of the unredeemed and will take place at the end of the Kingdom Age. Every unsaved person will face the great White Throne, and no one will be exempted. (Rev.20: 12-15). Everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life will be judged. This will be during the Resurrection of Damnation or second resurrection of the dead (1Cor.15.) for the unsaved will not resurrect during the first resurrection unto rapture (1 Thes.4:13-18). This judgment is not ordinary, as already explained, but is based on absolute justice (v13). Whoever, beginning with Adam and Eve, whose name will not be found written in the book of life (record of the redeemed) will be cast into Hell, the Lake of Fire (eternal separation from God). They will not die, but live forever in torment.
5. **JUDGMENT OF ALL NATIONS:** It takes place at the return of Christ in glory to establish His kingdom over Israel (Matthew 25:31-33). The basis for this judgment is the treatment of Jewish race by other nations. All the nations that curse, oppress and ridicule Israel, or all the enemy nations of Israel will be defeated and judged during the battle of Armageddon. This can be better understood by studying the Bible from

Revelation 4 through the end of the scripture. From here, we see that Israel resumes the centre stage position and continues as such.

- 6. JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL:** This involves the re-gathering of Israel at the end of Millennium period (**Ezekiel 20:33-38**). The bringing together or re-gathering of Israel prophecy will only be fulfilled at the Second Coming and the beginning of the Kingdom Age. Before this time Anti-Christ will invade Israel after short friendship that he will make with her, and the Israel will later realize that she had been fooled. Then God will begin to deal Israel by purging her during the last three and half years of Great Tribulation. At issue here is the opportunity to enter the millennial kingdom (Mal.3:2-5; 4:1-3).
- 7. JUDGMENT OF FALLEN ANGELS:** This is a condemnation of the Devil, (Satan, that old Serpent) and all His Angels (Rev.20:10). This includes those who cohabited with humans prior to the flood (Gen.6:1-4, 2Pet.2:4, Jude 1:6). These are the particular angels who did not maintain their original position in which they were created. They came on earth seeking to cohabit with daughters of men, which they did.

CONCLUSION

In executing such judgments, God is doing a virtue of his justice by processing an absolute perfection out of His infinite holiness. The Gospel of peace and the death of Christ on the cross is the only solution for God's justice and forgiving the guilty of the world, yet without overlooking sin in any way. According to Romans 3:25-26, Jesus was set forth to be propitiation through faith in Him. His death on Calvary declared His righteousness for the remission of our sins. It is destined for a man to die once and then face judgment. The final judgment is not yet until the second coming of the Son of God.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

13. The church and the permanent gifts

Verses 1-8a Love must control the exercise of all spiritual gifts

Using himself as an illustration, Paul said, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become [like] a resounding gong and a clashing cymbal." His speaking in a human language that had been miraculously imparted to him or, even more impressively, in the language angels use when

communicating with one another could indeed astonish others. The use of this gift, when devoid of love and so without any benefit to fellow believers, would amount to nothing more than a loud noise. (13:1)

Focusing on other divinely granted gifts, the apostle continued, “And if I have prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to transfer mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” (13:2)

The use of the prophetic gift often served to edify, console, strengthen and encourage others. This purpose could be attained only when the prophet had love and concern for those to whom his words were directed. (13:2)

Knowledge of “all the mysteries” would include a full understanding of the formerly concealed things of God that had been revealed. (Compare Ephesians 3:1-6.) “All the knowledge” would relate to a complete understanding of God’s will. With a thorough understanding of the “mysteries” and the divine purpose, the individual would be able to teach others. (13:2)

The faith that could transfer mountains from one place to another would be an unshakable conviction that a seemingly impossible course could be undertaken, with good results to follow. One in possession of this kind of miraculous faith would be able to help a community of believers or individuals within that community to act appropriately when faced with what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. (13:2)

By means of these gifts, those to whom they had been granted could be a blessing to others. While they were impressive endowments by reason of their miraculous nature, these gifts had not been granted to exalt the recipients. They had been given to benefit fellow believers. Therefore, without love being the motivating and guiding force in the use of these gifts, Paul could rightly say that he would be “nothing.” His use of the divinely imparted gifts would have been an empty display, designed to draw attention to himself. (13:2)

If he were to give away all his possessions to help persons in need, and were to surrender his very body so that he might “boast” (form of *kaucháomai*), but did not have love, he would not gain anything. Without real love for fellow humans, great sacrifices undertaken merely for the purpose of being observed and lauded by others have no value in God’s eyes. Regardless of how noble a certain action may appear to be, the absence of love reveals it to be hollow and self-serving. The individual derives no lasting benefit from mere outward acts of generosity and self-sacrifice. (13:3; see the Notes section.)

Love is a selfless compassion and concern for the welfare of others. It “is patient,” manifesting itself in being forbearing and having the capacity to endure difficult or trying circumstances without giving way to complaint or resentment. “Love is kind,” responding in a caring and compassionate way to fellow humans. It is “not jealous,” looking with envy or resentment at what others may have or be able to enjoy. (13:4)

Love is not given to self-praise. Those who have genuine love for fellow humans do not resort to boasting or bragging so as to make themselves appear superior to them. Love has nothing in common with an inordinate view of self that causes one to look down on others. The loving person is not “puffed up” or swollen with conceit, putting on airs. (13:4)

Love never manifests itself in indecent, shameful, rude, or crude ways or acts. It is a quality that is devoid of any hint of seeking its own interests and demanding its own way. Love is actively concerned with the welfare of fellow humans and is the very opposite of selfishness. The loving person looks at others with a humane spirit and, therefore, is not easily provoked or irritated by their failings. Appropriately, Paul said of love, “It is not provoked.” Love is not resentful, keeping a tally of hurt (either real or imagined) that one may have experienced on account of the thoughtless words or actions of others. The loving person does not look for opportunities to even the score. (13:5)

When love is at work, injustices, wrongs, or harmful developments are never the basis for rejoicing. Those who care about fellow humans do not take advantage of them. They are not like those who find delight in besting others through manipulation and deceit. The loving person finds no delight when fellow humans disgrace themselves or experience humiliation. Even when others may have been hateful, the loving person does not take pleasure in their misfortune. (13:6)

Love “rejoices with the truth.” Whatever contributes to the advancement of the things that are true, right, or proper brings joy to those who seek to be loving persons. (13:6)

Love “bears all things,” distinguishing itself by a willingness to make allowances, to forego personal rights out of regard for the conscientious scruples of others, and to view fellow humans with a reasonable disposition. When described as believing “all things,” love is not being identified as gullible and ready to believe lies and misrepresentations. This would not agree with the description that love “rejoices with the truth.” Love “believes” in that it is not suspicious, putting the worst construction possible on the words and actions of

others. Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, the loving person is willing to give fellow humans the benefit of the doubt. (13:7)

Verses 8b-13. Permanence of love.

Love “hopes all things,” not easily giving up on others. Those who endeavour to be loving in their dealings believe in the possibility for improvement and betterment and are willing to wait patiently as they seek to be a positive influence for good. Love “endures all things,” not lashing out or complaining bitterly when difficulties are encountered. The loving person seeks to make the best of the existing circumstances and does not resort to lawless ways in an attempt to force changes. (13:7)

“Love never fails.” The context suggests that this is not to be understood to mean that love always succeeds. Rather, as a quality, love is eternal. Unlike a stream that may fail, drying up during the hot summer or a period of drought, this will never happen to love. The miraculous gifts that existed when Paul addressed his words to the Corinthians were not to continue indefinitely. “Prophecies,” “tongues,” and “knowledge” would all cease. The gift of miraculous knowledge did not mean that the possessors thereof had the fullness of knowledge. For this reason, this gift of knowledge would cease upon being replaced by that which was complete. (13:8)

Paul acknowledged that both the knowing and the prophesying were solely “in part.” God had not revealed everything. The full revelation would come at a future time, and whatever is partial would then come to an end. Paul did not specify what he meant when referring to the coming of the “complete,” the “perfect,” or the “finished.” What he wrote in his preserved letters reveals that he looked forward to Jesus’ return in glory. So it seems reasonable to conclude that, upon Christ’s return with power and great splendor at a time that has not been disclosed, everything that had only been dimly or partially perceived will become clear. One’s recognizing the partial nature of present knowledge should restrain dogmatism and speculation, which often give rise to an unloving and divisive disposition. (13:9, 10)

Illustrating that growth in knowledge is to be expected, Paul referred to his own infancy or childhood. As a “babe” or a young child, he spoke, thought, and reasoned like a child. Upon becoming a man, he did not retain these childish ways, but he gave them up. (13:11)

Applying the illustration involving the end of the ways of childhood, the apostle continued, “For now we see obscurely [literally, ‘in an enigma’ or ‘in a riddle’]

by a mirror, but then [it will be] face to face. Now I am known in part, but then I will know fully even as I have been fully known.” The commonly used metal mirrors of ancient times did not provide a clear reflection. Likewise, the existing partial knowledge did not and still does not enable one to ascertain the fullness of the knowledge yet to be revealed. When the Son of God returns in glory, all that is partial will give way to that which is complete, making it possible to know fully or to perceive as one does when seeing face to face. Paul’s reference to having been fully known (literally, “I was recognized” or “I was [fully] known”) does not appear to apply to the kind of knowledge humans had of him. Not even he knew himself fully, but Jesus Christ and his Father truly did know him. Viewed from the standpoint of Christ’s return, Paul would come to have the kind of knowledge that the Son of God had of him. (13:12)

Whereas the apostle had indicated that the miraculous gifts would cease, faith, hope, and love would remain. An approved relationship with God and Christ continues to rest on faith, and the fulfilment of the divine promises is yet future, making hope essential. Faith relates to the things we do not see. When that which is yet unseen becomes a tangible reality, faith in connection with that particular aspect is no longer needed. Likewise, hope is no longer needed when what we hope for becomes our possession. Faith or trust finds its fulfillment through sight. Hope is realized when the hoped-for object comes into one’s possession. Accordingly, in relation to their object or objects, faith and hope are subject to transformation. Love, however, is constant. In the case of love, sight and possession do not produce the kind of change that is associated with faith and hope. This makes love the greatest of the three. God is neither faith nor hope. He is love. This is the attribute that is the manifestation of his complete identity. (13:13)

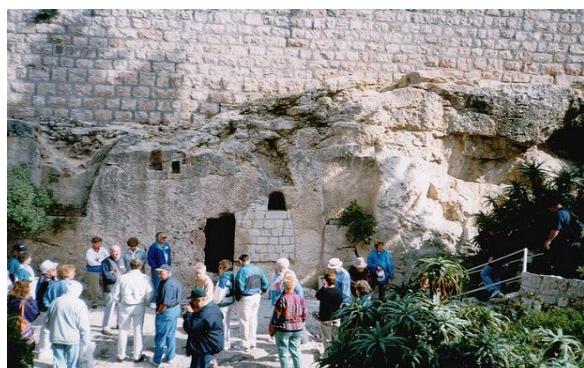
Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 13:3, numerous later manuscripts do not contain the Greek word meaning “boast” (*kaucháomai*). Instead, they use a form of the Greek word (*kaío*), which means “kindle” or “burn.”

By referring to the traits of infancy (in 13:11), Paul may also have been implying that the Corinthians needed to give up their infantile ways. Their wrong view of humans and the miraculous gifts were characteristic of babes and not persons who had attained the desirable maturity of members of Christ’s body. (3:1-3)

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Greek verb that can be rendered “fully known” is *epiginóske* and basically denotes knowledge that is obtained by fixing attention

upon someone or something. Other meanings for the Greek word are “recognize,” “acknowledge acquaintance with,” and “perceive.”



Open door of tomb at Calvary Garden



Tomb at Calvary Garden

1 Corinthians 14:1-40

14. Abuse of the sign gifts

Verses 1-11. The superiority of prophecy over tongues

Paul urged the Corinthians to pursue love, making it their aim to manifest it in all their dealings with others. His emphasis on love did not mean that he intended to minimize the value of the spiritual gifts. He did, in fact, encourage the believers to be “zealous” for these endowments, particularly the gift of prophesying. For the Corinthian believers to be zealous for the spiritual gifts would have meant to value all of them and to let all these endowments function for the benefit of the whole congregation. Especially prophesying, with its focus on consoling, edifying, strengthening, encouraging, and admonishing others, served to promote the spiritual well-being of the entire community of believers. (14:1)

Whenever no one present could translate the “tongue” being spoken, the one making expressions in an unknown language would not be speaking to “men” or to other persons, “but to God.” This would be because God understood what was being said, whereas no one else “heard” or listened with any comprehension. “To [the] spirit,” the individual would be speaking “mysteries.” This could mean that the expressions were made by or under the influence of God’s spirit. There is also a possibility that the reference is to the individual’s own spirit. (See verses 14 and 15, where Paul used the expression “my spirit.”) In that case, the speaking would be without conscious thought or previous reflection but with the intense feeling or emotion reflective of the person’s spirit or deep inner self under the power of the Holy Spirit. Likely the “mysteries” related to matters involving God’s will, which, though formerly undisclosed, would be expressed by the one speaking in a tongue. Another possible meaning is that, because of being spoken in a language the hearers did not understand, the words remained a mystery to them. (14:2)

The one who prophesied did speak to “men” or to others, conveying a message that served to build up or edify, encourage, or console them. (14:3) Persons who spoke in a tongue that no one else in the group understood would only be building themselves up and not the community of believers as a whole. Certain ones among the Corinthians with the gift of tongues prided themselves in having this evidence of the spirit’s operation (the very evidence that marked the reception of the spirit on the first day of Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to heaven) and made a show of it, making themselves seem superior to those who could not speak in tongues. (14:4)

Although problems had arisen among the Corinthian believers in connection with the gift of tongues, Paul would have wanted all of them to have this gift. His preference, though, would have been for all of them to be able to prophesy. On account of the greater good resulting to the community as a whole from prophesying (edifying, consoling, and encouraging), the apostle referred to the one who prophesied as being greater than the one who spoke in a tongue. Paul, however, included an exception. The speaking in a tongue did build up or edify the congregation when the message was translated. (14:5)

By means of a question, the apostle continued to stress the importance of imparting something valuable to the “brothers” or fellow believers. If he came to them speaking in tongues, how would they benefit unless he conveyed to them a revelation or knowledge or a prophecy or a teaching? The question implied that something meaningful would have to be imparted, something that the Corinthians could understand and from which they could derive benefit. An expression of a revelatory nature relating to God and Christ, a clarification of

God's will, an utterance that would serve to edify, encourage, or console, or a teaching about aspects of their life as believers would be more directly linked to the superior gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy. (14:6)

Illustrating the importance of meaningful expressions, Paul, with a rhetorical question, pointed out that inanimate or lifeless instruments, like a flute or a harp, can be used to produce sounds. Unless, however, the sounds are distinct notes, no one will recognize what is being played on the flute or the harp. (14:7) In the first century, armies commonly used trumpets as signaling instruments. If, though, the trumpet sounded indistinctly, who would have gotten "ready for battle"? Without a clear signal, the warriors would not have known what action they were to take. (14:8)

Likewise, Paul reasoned, speech needed to be intelligible for it to be understood. If no one comprehended what was being said, the one talking would have been "speaking into the air," with nothing of value to anyone. (14:9)

The apostle acknowledged that there must be a great variety of "sounds [probably denoting those used for communication] in the world." When mentioning that no sound is "soundless," Paul appears to have meant that no sound is without any significance. (14:10)

Nevertheless, if he did not "know" or understand the "power" or intent of the "sound," he would be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker would be a foreigner to him. Thus, by implication, Paul indicated that the manner in which the Corinthians were making use of the gift of tongues made them foreigners to their own brothers in the faith. (14:11)

Verses 12-40. Correction of the abuse of tongues

Although the Corinthians were "zealous of spirits," that is, eager for spiritual gifts, they needed to "abound" or "excel" in them for the benefit of the congregation, contributing to the upbuilding of all. Guided by love for fellow believers, the gifts would serve for the mutual strengthening and encouraging of everyone. (14:12)

From the standpoint of the community of believers as a whole, the gift of tongues needed to be enhanced through the gift of translation or interpretation. For this reason, Paul encouraged the one with the gift of tongues to pray for the ability to translate. (14:13)

Referring to himself to illustrate the matter of speaking only in a tongue, Paul said that his "spirit" would be praying but his "mind" would be "unfruitful."

Utterances originating from his spirit or inner being under the influence of God's spirit would flow from his mouth with intense feeling, but he would not be mentally involved in formulating his words. (14:14) Also his speaking in a tongue that fellow believers could not understand would be unproductive from the standpoint of not providing anything of spiritual value to them.

He then raised the question, "What, then, is it [that I should do]?" His answer could be understood in one of two ways. (1) There would be times when he would pray in or by the spirit, expressing himself in a tongue according to the prompting of his inmost self as guided by Holy Spirit, and at other times he would pray with his mind, with fully engaged mental faculties when formulating his words. He would sing in or by the spirit, with the praise that he expressed in a tongue being the product of his inner self under the influence of God's spirit, and he, with his mind fully involved, would sing or raise his voice in praise. (2) He would not limit himself to praying and singing in a tongue without engaging his mental faculties. Instead, he would do the praying and singing both with his spirit (with his inmost self) and his mind, thereby using his divinely imparted gift for the benefit of fellow believers. (14:15)

Paul next made an application to the one saying a blessing "in spirit," that is, the one doing so in a tongue under the power of the spirit. How would the one who did not understand the words be able to say in response, "Amen" (so be it)? (14:16) The words of thanksgiving may have been expressed well in the tongue, but the one who did not understand them would not be built up or edified. All he would have heard would have been unintelligible sounds. (14:17)

The apostle had been endowed with the gift of tongues and was grateful to God that he spoke more miraculously granted languages than all of the Corinthians. (14:18) Still, when believers were assembled as a congregation, he would prefer to speak "five words" with his mind, words they would understand and from which they could derive benefit, "than ten thousand words in a tongue," which would be meaningless to them and would fail to impart anything of value. (14:19)

When it came to thinking or understanding, Paul desired his Corinthian brothers (fellow believers) not to be children or inexperienced persons who lacked the insight to make use of their spiritual gifts for the well-being of the congregation. They did, however, need to be like babes respecting badness, living their lives free from the corrupt and debased actions and thoughts of a world at enmity with God. In all other respects, their objective should have been to be mature in their thinking or understanding. The error into which the Corinthians had fallen in

regard to the gift of tongues made it apparent that it was essential for them to strive for maturity. (14:20)

To aid them to correct their thinking, Paul continued to reason with them. He referred to a passage from Isaiah as being written “in the law,” using the term “law” in the sense of instruction (as expressed in the Torah), and then quoted the words, “With other tongues and with other lips, I will speak to this people, and neither thus will they hear me, says the Lord.” In the time of Isaiah, this occurred when armies invaded the land, speaking a language that was foreign to the Israelites who had disregarded YHWH’s law and the messages he conveyed to them through his prophets. (14:21)

Based on the words of Isaiah, the apostle pointed out that tongues served as a sign for unbelievers, not believers. As a consequence of their unbelief or lack of faith as evident from their disregard of God’s law, the Israelites experienced enemy invasions and heard “other tongues” and “other lips.” That development was a confirmatory sign of their unbelief, for it was part of the judgment against them for their unfaithfulness to God. Accordingly, for certain Corinthian believers to speak in a tongue that all the other fellow believers did not understand would be treating their own brothers like unbelievers, persons without faith. In this way, they would have made God a foreigner to them, not a friend and loving Father. (14:22)

Prophecy, on the other hand, was for believers, not unbelievers. The message of prophets was not conveyed in language that the congregation did not speak or understand. Their words served to edify, console, and encourage the entire community of believers in a meaningful way. (14:22)

A mere speaking in tongues without the benefit of translation could also have a potential negative effect on unbelievers. If an entire group of believers were assembled at one location and all were speaking in tongues at the same time, an outsider (not a fellow believer) who witnessed this would conclude that they had lost their senses. (14:23)

If an outsider (not a fellow believer) entered the place where believers had assembled and all of them were prophesying, this could result in positive good. The individual would hear admonition regarding God’s will, and it would become clear to him wherein he failed to measure up to the lofty divine standard. He would thus be reproved and examined, called to account, or judged. His hearing God’s requirements would expose his own words, thoughts, and deeds as disapproved. (14:24)

The “hidden [things] of his heart,” including the motives and disposition that were the reflection of his inmost self, would become manifest. Based on what he heard, he could be deeply moved and come to recognize the assembled believers as God’s people. In that case, he would fall to his knees and prostrate himself in worship, saying, “God is surely among you.” (14:25)

Answering the question about what should take place when his Corinthian “brothers” assembled, Paul indicated that the contribution all would be making should serve for the upbuilding of the whole congregation. The expressions made could be in the form of a “psalm” or a song of praise, a “teaching” (including the imparting of knowledge regarding God’s will and purpose), a “revelation” (as would be related by one with the prophetic gift), and a message spoken in a tongue and then translated for the benefit of everyone present. (14:26)

The apostle recommended that the speaking in tongues be limited to “two or three at the most,” with each speaker taking turns and someone doing the translating. (14:27) In the event no one present had the gift of interpretation of tongues, Paul admonished that the person with the gift of tongues should not make a display of it but should remain silent, speaking “to himself and to God.” When the message conveyed in a tongue could not be understood by the congregation, it would not have served for the edification of those assembled. For this reason, the individual would appropriately make use of the gift in communing with God, the one who did understand the tongue. (14:28)

During the course of the meeting of the congregation, two or three prophets might speak. Thereafter the words of the prophets were to be evaluated, weighed, or judged. Believers with the gift to discern “spirits” (12:10) would then need to use that gift for the benefit of the congregation, making clear whether the prophetic message was indeed from God. Those assembled were not to be passive listeners who simply accepted everything that might be said. They were to be concerned about confirming the truth of the spoken word and thereafter to make it their own. (14:29)

In the event a revelation would be imparted to a prophet who was seated while one of the other prophets related his message, the believer with the new revelation was not to relate it until the first prophet had finished speaking. Based on the comments that follow, this is the apparent meaning of the words, “Let the first [one] be silent.” It seems less likely that Paul recommended that the one speaking should stop immediately and let the one with the new revelation start speaking. Without a signal from the seated believer or without miraculous

discernment, the first prophet would not have known about the new revelation. (14:30)

Prophets were to take turns in relating their respective messages, not talking at the same time. This would make it possible for all assembled to learn from each prophet and to be encouraged by their words. (14:31)

Upon receiving a revelation, a prophet was not simultaneously impelled to express it. This appears to be the significance of Paul's words, "And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." The "spirits" or the spirit-imparted revelations came into their possession in order for them to make them known at appropriate times. The prophets had full control over when and where they would proclaim the message they had received. This served to prevent disorder, with more than one prophet speaking at the same time. (14:32)

When prophets took their turns in speaking during meetings of the congregation, this proved to be in harmony with what God has revealed about himself. Paul added, "For God is [a God], not of disorder, but of peace." The creation does not reflect an unpredictable state of chaos. If the prophets had all spoken at the same time, this could not have been described as orderly and peaceful, tranquil, or harmonious. (14:33) Likewise, the use of all the other gifts should have been a reflection of the one by whom they were given, God.

The maintenance of proper decorum in "all the congregations of the holy ones" (communities of believers who are holy on the basis of their faith in Christ and the resultant purity of their lives) included the way in which women conducted themselves when believers assembled. (14:33)

At such times, the women or wives were to be "silent," not disruptive, comporting themselves as respectful listeners and learners. This would be in keeping with the subordinate role of women in the family arrangement. It would have been contrary to the sense of modesty and propriety for a woman to step out of her role as a wife under her husband's headship and to teach him and other husbands publicly. (14:34)

Paul appealed to the backing of the law for this position regarding a woman's proper place as one in subjection to her husband. (14:34) The law revealed that Adam was created first and that the woman was deceived, whereas Adam was not. (1 Timothy 2:13, 14) Accordingly, in relation to her husband by reason of his priority, the first woman was in the position of a learner, not a teacher. When she assumed a role of teaching him something contrary to what he knew about the forbidden fruit, she did so as a person who had been deceived.

If a woman wanted clarification about something that may have come up while the congregation was assembled, she could ask her husband about it in the privacy of their home. It would have been disgraceful for a woman to have become disruptive, speaking out and raising questions. It appears that there were women in Corinth who mistook their spiritual equality with men as authorizing them to assume a teaching role, expressing their views and raising challenging questions. The manner in which they comported themselves appears to have been disruptive to the order and peace of the congregation. (14:35; see the Notes section.)

Because many of the Corinthians had acted contrary to the expected standards of orderliness and propriety, Paul asked, “Did the word of God come forth from you, or did it reach only to you?” The community of believers in Corinth was just one of many, and the “word of God” or the message regarding his Son and what he accomplished through him had not originated with the Corinthians. At the time Paul began to proclaim the glad tidings about Jesus Christ in Corinth, other congregations were already in existence. Moreover, the “word of God” had reached many other places besides Corinth. Therefore, the Corinthians had no basis for initiating practices that departed from the pattern all the other congregations followed. (14:36)

Believers who truly were prophets and spiritual persons or possessors of spiritual gifts would have been moved to acknowledge the rightness of what Paul had written, for, as he added, they were the “Lord’s commandment.” Jesus Christ had consistently upheld the principles set forth in the law, referring to the account about Adam and Eve as revealing his Father’s purpose respecting the marriage arrangement. (Genesis 2:22-24; Matthew 19:4-6) Accordingly, anyone who considered himself to be a prophet, or to have spiritual endowments, should have accepted what the apostle said. If, though, someone refused to accept the truth of Paul’s words, then such a one could remain in his stubborn ignorance. The apostle expressed this bluntly, “But if anyone be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” (14:37, 38 [This rendering of verse 38 has the support of P46 (c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and many other manuscripts; see the Notes section.])

He continued to lay stress on the gift of prophecy because of its great potential for benefiting the entire community of believers, telling the Corinthians to “be zealous to prophesy.” While they were to be eager to let this gift be used to the full, Paul did not want them to overact in connection with the gift of tongues. The Corinthians may have been inclined to stop all speaking in tongues to prevent the kind of abuses that had occurred, but he instructed them not to forbid

the speaking in tongues. Their concern when assembling was to be that everything occurred in a fitting and orderly manner. (14:39, 40)

Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 14:21, the quotation from Isaiah differs from the extant Septuagint text. The wording of the quotation from Isaiah 28:11 reflects the meaning of the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. Although Paul used the first person singular (instead of the third person singular), this did not alter the significance of the quotation, for the speaker is still YHWH. The extant Septuagint text of Isaiah 28:11 and part of verse 12 reads, “[It is] because of contempt of lips, through another tongue, that they will speak to this people, saying to them, This [is] the rest for the one hungering.”

Both the Hebrew text and the extant Septuagint text include the words about not “hearing” (or “listening”) at the end of Isaiah 28:12, but these words follow a positive message conveyed to the Israelites prior to the time they would be hearing the foreign speech. It appears that Paul, for his purpose, appropriated the words about not hearing, doing so with specific application to the tongues that would have sounded like gibberish to the Israelites. When the prophetic words of Isaiah were fulfilled, the people heard enemy warriors communicate in an incomprehensible language. Through these foreigners, God spoke in a manner the Israelites did not “hear” or understand. It can also be said that he thus spoke to them in expression of his judgment, but they did not listen to him and change their ways. Translations commonly render the words of 1 Corinthians 14:21 to mean that, when God would speak to them “with other tongues and with other lips,” the people still would not pay any attention to him.

Paul’s admonition about evaluating, judging, or examining the words of the prophets (14:29) points up the error of the controlling elements in movements who insist that their interpretations of the Scriptures be accepted without being submitted to careful scrutiny. Since the utterances of believers with the miraculous gift of prophecy were to be submitted to evaluation, how much more so should the words (whether spoken or written) of those who do not have this gift! Believers have a personal responsibility to use all their God-given abilities to make sure that what they are being told is in harmony with the example and teaching of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Earlier (in 11:4-16), Paul discussed the matter of women praying and prophesying but doing so with their heads covered. Here (in 14:34, 35), his words about not permitting women or wives to speak apparently relate to a different situation, for this prohibition appears in a context that specifically deals

with the maintenance of proper order and decorum. This suggests that certain women in Corinth had engaged in disruptive speaking and questioning and had acted out of harmony with the manner in which the family arrangement was divinely ordained to function. Paul did not include specifics about the improper speaking. Therefore, although the Corinthians would have understood exactly what the apostle addressed, we today do not.

In a number of manuscripts, the words of verses 34 and 35 appear after verse 40. Based on this transposition and a perceived inconsistency between the discussion about women praying and prophesying with their heads covered (11:4-16) and the directive that they be silent in the congregation, some have regarded verses 34 and 35 of chapter 14 as a later interpolation. There is, however, no ancient manuscript support for this conjecture, and the passage in 1 Corinthians 14 can be understood in a way that does not contradict Paul's earlier comments in 1 Corinthians 11.

The Greek word *agnoéo* (appearing twice in 14:38) can refer to "being ignorant" or "not being recognized." In the case of the second occurrence of this verb, numerous manuscripts contain the passive form (instead of the imperative form found in other manuscripts, including P46). Many translators have chosen to render the verb according to its passive significance but with different interpretive meanings. "Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized." (NRSV) "If he does not acknowledge this, his own claim cannot be acknowledged." (REB) "So don't pay attention to anyone who ignores what I am writing." (CEV) "Those who ignore this will be ignored by God." (NCV) "If anyone does not recognise this, it is because that person is not recognised himself." (NJB)

1 Corinthians 15:1-58

15. The doctrine of resurrection

15: 1-19. The fact and import of Christ's resurrection

Verses 1-11. The fact of Christ's resurrection

To indicate a change in subject, Paul used the word *dé* (commonly meaning "but"), which here may be understood to denote "now" ("Now I want to make known to you"). His "making known" the evangel or good news he had proclaimed was from the standpoint of reminding his "brothers" (fellow believers in Corinth) about what he had taught them. This was because certain ones were advancing a view about the resurrection that did not harmonize with the glad tidings about Christ. In response to the apostle's initial preaching, the

Corinthians had accepted the evangel and, as persons who continued to adhere to it as trustworthy, they could be spoken of as “standing” in it. (15:1)

The good news that focused on Christ revealed how sinful humans could be forgiven of their transgressions and be saved or delivered from being condemned as persons who failed to reflect God’s image. When the Corinthians accepted the evangel, they responded in faith to Christ and the forgiveness of sins made possible through his death. Therefore, “through” the glad tidings about the Son of God, the “word” or message Paul had proclaimed to them, “they were also saved,” provided they continued to adhere to it. If they did not maintain their firm hold on the “good news,” their initial faith in the message the apostle had made known to them would have proved to be in vain. (15:2)

He handed on to them the same word or message that he had received. The expression that literally means “in first things” could be understood to signify that the teachings Paul next mentioned were of first importance when he shared this message with the Corinthians. He taught them “that Christ died for our sins” and that this occurred “according to the Scriptures.” (15:3)

Likely the apostle had in mind prophecies in Isaiah and Zechariah. “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5, NRSV) “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7, NRSV) “And I [YHWH] will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him.” (Zechariah 12:10, NRSV) “On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” (Zechariah 13:1, NRSV)

After being buried, Christ “was raised on the third day.” This also took place “according to the Scriptures.” (15:4) From the book of Acts, we know that Paul used words from Psalms (16:10; 15:10, LXX) to show that Christ was foretold to rise from the dead. “You will not permit your holy one to see corruption.” (Acts 13:35) While Jesus was on earth, he referred to the sign of Jonah as indicating that he would be resurrected on the third day, and the apostle may have had this in mind. (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40) There is also a possibility that Paul may have thought about a reference in Hosea (6:2, LXX), “On the third day, we will rise and live before him.”

Cephas (the Semitic form of the name “Peter,” meaning “rock”) was the first apostle to see the risen Christ. The occasion on which Jesus later appeared to the “twelve” seems to have been when Thomas was present. (John 20:26, 27) At that time, the apostles numbered eleven, which suggests that Paul used the designation “the twelve” as representative of the entire company of the apostles. (15:5)

It must have been at a mountain in Galilee that the risen Christ appeared to upward of 500 brothers, most of whom were still alive when Paul sent his letter to the Corinthians. (15:6) This appears to have been the meeting Christ had prearranged, as suggested by the fact that so many were assembled at one place. (Matthew 28:10, 16) According to Matthew 28:17, “some doubted.” This could not have applied to the apostles, for they had been fully convinced that Christ had been resurrected. Even the previous doubts of Thomas had been completely overcome. This reference to doubts confirms that the account in Matthew refers to a meeting with more disciples than the apostles. Considering the difficulty even the apostles had in believing the reports about Christ’s resurrection, one can readily see why there may have been some who doubted after their seeing him for the first time since his rising from the dead.

Paul mentioned that some of the upward of 500 brothers had fallen asleep in death. (15:6) Included among those who had died was the apostle James whom Herod Agrippa I had executed with the sword. (Acts 12:1, 2)

The James to whom Jesus appeared next could not have been the apostle James, the brother of John. He was among the apostles who had previously seen the resurrected Son of God. So it must have been the James who was widely known among believers. (15:7) This would have been “James the brother of the Lord.” Like his other brothers, he did not become a believer during the early period of Jesus’ ministry. (John 7:3-5; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19) It may well be that Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance eliminated all his former doubts and moved him to put faith in him as the promised Messiah and God’s beloved Son.

The time “all the apostles” saw Jesus probably is to be linked to his last appearance. (15:7) The fact that they are not referred to as “the twelve” suggests that the group included other men. Matthias, the replacement for Judas Iscariot, may have been one in this group. (Acts 1:6-26)

Last of all, Jesus appeared to Paul, as if to one of “abnormal birth” (*éktroma*). The Greek term *éktroma* can denote an untimely birth, miscarriage, or a birth later than the usual term. Paul seems to have used this designation to indicate something disparaging about himself. Perhaps he meant to indicate that his

situation at the time Jesus appeared to him resembled that of a prematurely born infant that had no opportunity for life, no name, and no potential for anything that life might have to offer. (15:8)

None of the disciples numbered among “the twelve” had ever been active opposers. Paul, however, had been a rabid persecutor of the “congregation of God.” As persons purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, believers belonged to his Father and so were his people or his congregation. When Paul had his encounter with the risen Christ, he was on a mission to arrest believers in Damascus and to bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. (Acts 7:58-8:1; 9:1-6; 22:4-9; 26:9-15) In view of his past record as a persecutor, Paul acknowledged himself to be the “least of the apostles” and unfit to be called an apostle. (15:9)

He attributed his being an apostle (“I am what I am”) to God’s favour or unmerited kindness. This favour had not been extended to him in vain, for he labored in the advancement of Christ’s cause to a greater extent than all the other apostles. Nevertheless, he did not take personal credit for his hard work but minimized his own role, adding that he was able to accomplish what he did by the “favour of God” that was with him. Divine aid strengthened and sustained him in carrying out his ministry. (15:10)

Although Paul laboured harder than the other apostles, he and they proclaimed the same message, which the Corinthians had come to believe. A prominent part of this message related to Christ’s death and resurrection. (15:11)

Verses 12-19. Christ’s resurrection the basis of ours.

The reliable testimony of many witnesses established that Jesus had been resurrected. Appropriately, therefore, Paul asked, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as having been raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” Jesus’ resurrection confirmed the certain fulfillment of the hope that the dead would live again as the very same persons. (15:12)

A denial of the resurrection would constitute a rejection of the reality of Christ’s resurrection. If he was not raised from the dead, all of Paul’s hard work would have been for nothing. Apparently using the editorial first person plural, the apostle continued, “Our proclamation [would be] in vain, and your [our, according to other manuscripts] faith [would be] in vain.” (15:13, 14)

Besides having exerted himself in a meaningless endeavor, Paul would have been guilty of spreading false testimony about God. He would have been telling others that God resurrected Christ, whereas, if there is no resurrection of the dead, he had not done so. (15:15; see the Notes section.)

The resurrection hope is so inextricably linked to the reality of Christ's resurrection that the apostle could say, "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised." (15:16) There would have been no basis for the Corinthians to have faith in the Son of God if he had not been raised from the dead. His resurrection confirmed that he was God's Son and not just another notable teacher or prophet whose life ended prematurely and whose death could not provide deliverance from the condemnation of sin. Rejection of the reality of Christ's resurrection would have made the faith of the Corinthians useless, for it would have left them without hope and in the same sinful condition existing prior to their response to Paul's proclamation. They would have continued to be in their sins, with no basis existing for forgiveness and reconciliation with God as his beloved children. (15:17)

This also would have meant that those who had fallen asleep in death as persons "in Christ," or as believers at one with him as members of his body, perished. They would have died without any hope of their ever living again as the same persons. (15:18)

In the world alienated from and at enmity with God, believers endured much distress. They were often the objects of intense hostility. So, "if in this life only we have hoped in Christ [with everything terminating at death]," Paul reasoned, "we of all men are to be pitied." The lot of believers would indeed have been tragic if the suffering and reproach they bore for the sake of Christ would finally all be for nothing. (15:19)

15:20-23. Christ's resurrection and ours

Verses 20-23. Christ's resurrection a guarantee of ours

"Now, however, Christ has been raised from the dead, [the] firstfruits of those asleep [in death]." As the first one to be resurrected to immortal life, Jesus Christ is the firstfruits. His resurrection assured that many more would be raised from the dead, just as the ingathering of the firstfruits is followed by the major harvest. (15:20)

Verses 21-33. Christ's resurrection the divine remedy for the Fall

Death came into the world of humankind through a man—the first man, Adam. While on earth, Jesus Christ also was a man and, through him, resurrection from the dead came to be a certainty. (15:21)

In Adam, the original progenitor of the human family, all his descendants are dying. As a sinner, he could only father sinful offspring under the condemnation

of death. In Christ, though, “all will be made alive.” God’s unique Son, the sinless one, is in possession of life-giving power. (John 5:26-29) In him, therefore, resides the life that makes resurrection possible. (15:22)

The resurrection takes place according to a specific “order” (*tágma*). Having been the first to rise from the dead, Christ is the firstfruits. Thereafter those who belong to him come to life at his “arrival” (*parousía*). The Greek word *parousía* denotes “presence,” “advent,” or “arrival” and here applies to Jesus’ return in the capacity of king and judge. (15:23)

15: 24-28. Resurrection and the final consummation

Verses 24-26. The final abrogation of death

When referring to the “end” (“next the end”), Paul appears to have meant the conclusion or fulfilment of Christ’s work, his reducing to nothingness all dominion, authority and power that is hostile to his Father. Once he has accomplished this, Jesus Christ will hand over the kingdom or the royal authority he exercised in destroying everything that is out of harmony with God’s will and purpose. The handing over of the kingdom signifies that his Father will then be the Sovereign over everything without there being any elements in a state of enmity with him. (15:24)

Jesus Christ acts as his Father’s agent. For this reason, Paul could speak of Christ as reigning until “God has placed all enemies under his feet,” granting him the complete triumph comparable to trampling upon them. (15:25)

Death is the “last enemy” to be deprived of might. When Christ uses his God-given power to resurrect the dead (John 5:26-28), death is defeated, unable to keep the dead in its unyielding grip. (15:26)

Verses 27-28. The second state

Drawing on the words of Psalm 8:6(7), Paul continued, “For [God] subjected all things under his [Christ’s] feet.” As a man on earth, Jesus Christ was lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5(6); Hebrews 2:7), but that ceased to be the case when he rose from the dead. His Father then gave him “all authority in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18) Subjection to that authority could be expressed by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord in full support of his Father’s will. Otherwise, the subjection would take the form of utter defeat, for the Father would let his Son vanquish everyone and everything that remained out of harmony with his purpose. (15:27)

Next the apostle called attention to a fact that is self-evident. “All” or everything that is subjected to Christ does not include his Father, “the one who subjected all things to him.” (15:27) When all things have been subjected to Christ, he will subject himself to his Father, “so that God may be all in all.” To all, God will then be the Sovereign in the ultimate sense, and he will be in complete harmony with all, working in and through them for the accomplishment of his will and purpose. (15:28)

15:29-34. Christ’s resurrection and new incentives

Verse 29. The incentive to be baptised for the dead

Continuing to develop his argument about the resurrection, Paul raised the questions, “What will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they also baptized for them?” (15:29; see the Notes section.) While the Corinthians knew exactly what Paul meant, we today cannot be certain.

One view is that some in Corinth got baptized for persons who had died before being able to get immersed. If the reference is to vicarious baptism (as Tertullian [c. 160-c. 221 CE] concluded [On the Resurrection of the Flesh, chapter XLVIII]), there is no need to regard Paul’s questions as endorsing the practice. The apostle’s mentioning it served his purpose to call attention to a contradiction. Such an act would have been completely meaningless if the dead are not to be raised to life. In view of other innovations the Corinthians introduced, it is not completely inconceivable that the practice started among them and that this is a matter Paul may have planned to handle when again with them. (15:29; compare 11:34.)

Another possible explanation that has gained a measure of acceptance is understanding the questions to relate to baptism with suffering and death in view. For one to become a disciple of God’s Son included the possibility of having to face death for his sake. (Compare Mark 10:38, 39; Luke 12:50.) The Greek wording, though, is not specific enough to suggest this significance.

Verses 30-34. The incentive to live dangerously

Either using the editorial first person plural “we” or including his close associates, Paul raised the question, “Why also are we in danger every hour?” Would it have made any sense for the apostle constantly to expose himself to danger, having his life repeatedly threatened because of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, if there was no resurrection hope? (15:30)

So real was the risk of death that Paul said, “I die every day.” If it had not been for his service in the cause of Christ, he would not have faced constant peril. The apostle affirmed his words about dying daily, implying that this proved to be just as certain as his boasting over or exulting in his Corinthian “brothers” or fellow believers. Based on his expressions, they knew that he did indeed take pride in them. He boasted “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The apostle could speak of boasting in Christ because of being at one with him as a member of his corporate body. Paul could rightfully take pride in the Corinthians, for they were the fruit of his labour. This fruit from labouring in the service of his Lord made it worthwhile for the apostle to endure all the perils to which he had been exposed. (15:31; see the Notes section.)

Paul called attention to a grave danger he had faced in Ephesus. Concerning this, he raised the question, “If, according to man, I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what benefit [was] this to me?” The expression “according to man” may be understood to mean “in the manner of humans,” “like a human,” “like an ordinary man without hope in Christ,” “for purely human reasons without the hope of a resurrection,” or “so to speak” (as an idiom). (15:32)

Paul’s words would seem to indicate that, while in Ephesus, he faced wild animals in an arena but escaped death. When (in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27) referring to the perils he had endured, however, he did not mention fighting wild beasts, and the incident is not included in the book of Acts. This suggests that he may not have been forced to engage in combat with wild animals but that he had to contend with vicious opposers who, like fierce predators, were determined to harm him. It would have been pointless for Paul to have continued pursuing a course that put him in harm’s way if the dead are not resurrected. He would have been better off to live according to the saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (15:32)

During the time of Isaiah, faithless Israelites expressed themselves to this effect. (Isaiah 22:13) Faced with Assyria’s threatened siege of Jerusalem, the people strengthened the city’s fortifications and secured the water supply, but they failed to look to YHWH, the sure source of dependable protection. The existing threat should have moved them to repentance and a rejection of their former lawless ways, but they chose to engage in unrestrained carousing (eating and drinking) in view of the possibility of death at the hands of enemy forces. For persons without faith and hope, this is the option they are inclined to adopt, and it would have appeared preferable for persons without any hope of a resurrection to get and secure as much pleasure out of life as possible. (Isaiah 22:9-14)

The Corinthians may have thought that freely associating with those who rejected the resurrection hope and listening to their arguments would do no harm. Paul, however, recognized the danger faithless companions posed and how destructive to faith their influence could be. He admonished the Corinthians not to be deceived and then added, “Bad companionships corrupt noble habits.” Ancient Greek dramatist Menander (342-292 BCE) expressed the same thought, and it is likely that the Corinthians were familiar with it. For the Corinthians to avoid having their faith undermined would have required being careful about whom they made their close associates, not allowing themselves to be deceived into thinking that faithless ones could not sway them with their arguments. (15:33)

With some among the Corinthians saying that there was no resurrection (15:12), the potential for spiritual harm was very real, calling for vigilance on the part of the others. Paul urged the Corinthians to become fully alert, sobering up in the right way as from a drunken stupor, and not to sin. When individuals cease to believe in the resurrection and any future accountability for their actions, this commonly leads to their adopting a way of life contrary to God’s ways. So there was good reason for the apostle to tell the Corinthians, “Do not sin.” The ones to whom he referred as being ignorant of God were those who denied the divine power that made the resurrection from the dead possible. (15:34)

15:35-58 Resurrection and conquest over death

Verses 35-49. The character of the resurrection body

Paul’s strong language was designed to move the Corinthians to “shame,” causing them to recognize how wrong they had been in their reasoning. It should have been a cause for shame that, despite the overwhelming evidence regarding Christ’s resurrection, some among them denied the resurrection hope. There should also have been shame in the case of any who may have allowed themselves to be wrongly influenced by false teaching about the resurrection or who may have been very tolerant respecting such false teaching. (15:34)

Addressing those who argued against belief in the resurrection, Paul continued, “But someone will say, How are the dead to be raised, and with what kind of body are they coming [back]?” Any objectors would have known that dead bodies decayed, and the question implied that there were no existing bodies to be restored to life. (15:35)

From the apostle’s perspective, those who raised the issue about the resurrection were “senseless,” for they had not really given sufficient thought to their

conclusions. (15:36) Using illustrations from the physical world, Paul pointed out that the decay of the body had no bearing on the resurrection and that bodies of various kinds or forms existed.

“What you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” The sown seed ceases to exist, and the plant that develops bears no resemblance to a single seed. (15:36)

Therefore, as Paul continued, only a bare seed, either of wheat or of another grain, is sown. The sower does not sow the “body” or the plant in its developed form. (15:37)

According to Genesis 1:11, God created plants to produce according to their kind. Rightly, then, Paul could speak of God as giving to the sown seed a body just as he willed, and to each of the distinctive seeds its “own body” or plant form. (15:38)

The nature of animal and human bodies also differs. The flesh of humans, cattle, birds, and fish is not identical. (15:39)

Both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies exist, with the heavenly bodies having a distinctive glory or splendor and the earthly bodies having a different magnificence. The glory of the sun differs from that of the moon and from that of the stars. “Star differs from star in glory.” The widely different “earthly bodies” or forms of plant, animal, and human life possess their own distinctive glory, beauty, attractiveness, or suitability for their existence. In view of Paul’s reference to the sun, moon, and stars, he evidently did not use the expression “heavenly bodies” to mean bodies existing in the invisible spirit realm. Instead, he seems to have chosen to refer to things the Corinthians could readily see and observe. The perceivable brightness of the sun was much greater than that of the moon and of any of the stars that appeared as much smaller objects of light in the night sky. Even in the case of the stars, a difference in brightness could be seen. (15:40, 41)

Based on what the Corinthians could readily observe in the physical world, Paul made the application to the resurrection. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If a physical body exists, a spiritual one also exists. And thus it is written [in Genesis 2:7], ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul’; the last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit.” (15:42-45)

The human body is perishable, but the resurrection body is not of a perishable nature. It is incorruptible. When compared to the transcendent magnificence of

the immortal resurrection body that is free from the limitations associated with the present earthly existence, the physical human body appears to be in a state of humiliation and frailty. The contrast between the body of the first man, Adam, and the resurrection body of Jesus Christ, the “last Adam,” proves the existence of two different bodies—one earthly and the other heavenly. (15:42-44)

The first man, Adam, “became a living soul,” a physical being suited for an earthly existence and endowed with the capacity to father offspring. Jesus Christ, as a spirit person (no longer in his physical state as a man), is in possession of living-giving power. His Father has not granted nor will he grant this power to anyone else, making Jesus Christ the “last Adam.” As a life-giving spirit, he can impart life that transcends the physical life which has been passed on to all members of the human race through the procreation process that started with Adam. God’s unique Son can raise the dead to a newness of life on a far higher plane than that of the present physical existence. (15:45)

For humans, the physical life precedes the spiritual. “First” comes the physical (not the spiritual), then comes the spiritual. (15:46) The first man, Adam, was “from the earth, the dust,” his physical body consisting of earthly elements. This was not so with the second man. The Lord Jesus Christ is from heaven and, therefore, is “spiritual.” (15:47)

As Adam, the one from “dust” or from earthly elements, was physical in nature, so his descendants share the same nature, for all are also from “dust” or from earthly elements. Jesus Christ, the “heavenly one,” is “spiritual” in nature, and this would also be true of all other “heavenly ones.” In the context of his comments about the resurrection, Paul appears to have used the expression “heavenly ones” regarding believers who would come to be such, for he added, “And just as we have borne the image of the [man] of dust, we shall bear [let us bear, according to many other manuscripts] the image of the heavenly one.” The resurrection body of believers ceases to bear the image of the first earthling, Adam. Suited for life in the realm the Son of God occupies, the resurrection body bears his image, a heavenly one. (15:48, 49)

Verses 50-58; The change that produces the resurrection body

For them to be united to Christ in his kingdom or royal realm, believers cannot continue to have a body appropriate only for an earthly existence. “But this I say, brothers,” Paul continued, “flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s kingdom, neither can corruption inherit incorruption.” God’s kingdom, or the realm where he exercises his sovereign will through his Son, is heavenly. “Flesh and blood,” though essential for life on earth, are unsuitable for a heavenly existence.

Whatever is corruptible or perishable in nature cannot be part of an imperishable realm. (15:50)

Upon Christ's return as king and judge, believers then alive will be changed in order to be with him. This aspect had been an undisclosed divine "mystery" for centuries, but was revealed after Jesus Christ came to the earth. Commenting on the "mystery," the apostle explained, "We shall not all fall asleep [in death], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." In his first letter to the Thessalonians (4:15-17), Paul indicated that the "dead in Christ" would be resurrected first and afterward believers who were then alive would join the Lord. At the divinely designated time (represented as being announced by a trumpet blast), this would take place. The reference to the "last trumpet" suggests that this would herald the last event for believers on earth. Just as the resurrection of the Son of God occurred suddenly, the change living believers would experience from the mortal to the immortal state is described as taking place quickly ("in a moment, in the blink of an eye"). (15:51, 52)

For their new life (whether by change or through the resurrection), believers must be in possession of incorruption and deathlessness. Therefore, Paul said that it was necessary for "the corruptible to put on incorruption and the mortal to put on immortality." (15:53) With the corruptible replacing the incorruptible and the immortal the mortal, death will have been defeated. The words of Isaiah 25:8 will then be fulfilled, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (15:54; see the Notes section.)

Paul followed the quotation of Isaiah with one from Hosea 13:14, "Where, O death, [is] your victory? Where, O death, [is] your sting?" The swallowing up of death signifies defeat, not triumph. Also the sting that brings about death would be rendered ineffective. (15:55; see the Notes section.)

The apostle identified "sin" as being the "sting of death," for sin brings about the condemnation that leads to death. He referred to the law as the "power of sin," for the law clearly set forth what constituted sin. In identifying individuals as having sinned or missed the mark of moral rectitude in attitude, word, or action, the law declared them to be subject to sin and under condemnation. (15:56)

With the law providing no help in the victory over death but proving to be the power of sin, revealing those under the law to be condemned sinners, the triumph over death had to come from another source. Gratefully, the apostle

exclaimed, “But thanks [be] to God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” In expression of his deep love for humankind, God gave his unique Son as the means for liberation from sin and death. The Son of God died sacrificially, taking upon himself the consequences of human sin—past, present, and future. Through faith in him and his sacrificial death, believers are freed from condemnation and their resurrection is assured, with the resultant defeat of death. (15:57)

Paul urged his “beloved brothers” or fellow believers in Corinth to become “steadfast” and “immovable, always abounding in the Lord’s work, knowing that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” Particularly in their faith regarding the resurrection, they needed to be firm and unwavering. The surety of the resurrection hope should have motivated them to be diligent in advancing the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. With their resurrection being assured, they would know that their labours would not be in vain. Neither God nor Christ would forget their rightly motivated service, and so their future reward was certain. (15:58; compare Hebrews 6:10.)

Notes:

The apostle did not indicate how he had received the message that he proclaimed. (15:3) In his letter to the Galatians (1:11, 12), he identified the source as having been direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5, some later copyists changed “twelve” to “eleven” to correct what they seemingly perceived to be an error.

Paul’s words (in 15:15) indicate that he took very seriously any misrepresentation of God’s activity. Attributing to God what is definitely not his work would make one guilty of spreading false testimony about him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, the apostle’s focus was on the resurrection as it related to fellow believers in Corinth. For this apparent reason, he may have chosen to mention only those who are “of Christ” or who belong to him. Paul’s comments (in Acts 24:15) about a resurrection of “both the righteous and the unrighteous” indicate that he did not intend to limit the resurrection to the dead in Christ. Moreover, for “each one” to be made alive in his own order would require that others besides the dead belonging to Christ be resurrected.

The Greek word for “order” (*tágma*) can also designate a “class” or “group,” and the term for “end” (*télos*) in verse 24 may signify “conclusion,” “goal,” “outcome,” “rest,” or “remainder.” This is the basis for the view that Paul actually mentioned three groups: (1) Christ the firstfruits, (2) those who belong

to Christ, and (3) the “rest” [*télos*] when the last enemy death is destroyed. Footnotes in the *New Revised Standard Version* and the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* include “rest” as an alternate rendering, but the reading “end” in the main text is the widely accepted preferred significance.

If the word *télos* (in 15:24) denotes “outcome” or “goal,” the meaning would be that the goal is for Christ to hand over the kingdom to his God and Father after having reduced all enemies to nothingness. The German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* renders the verse according to this meaning. *Und dann wird Christus die Herrschaft Gott, dem Vater, übergeben — dann, wenn er allen gottfeindlichen Mächten, Kräften und Gewalten ein Ende bereitet hat; dann ist das Ziel erreicht.* (And then Christ will hand over the rulership to God, the Father — then, when he had made an end to all dominions, powers and authorities hostile to God, then is the goal attained.)

Another way in which the questions in 15:29 can be punctuated is, “What will those do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead are not raised at all? Why are they also baptized for them?”

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) omits the word “brothers” in 1 Corinthians 15:31, as do a number of later manuscripts.

The words of 15:32 (“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”) are identical to the extant Septuagint reading of Isaiah 22:13.

Similarly, the Book of Wisdom (thought to have been written in the first century BCE), represents the faithless wicked ones as reasoning among themselves: “Brief and troublous is our lifetime; neither is there any remedy for man’s dying, nor is anyone known to have come back from the nether world. For haphazard were we born, and hereafter we shall be as though we had not been; because the breath in our nostrils is a smoke and reason is a spark at the beating of our hearts, and when this is quenched, our body will be ashes and our spirit will be poured abroad like unresisting air. Even our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will recall our deeds. So our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and will be dispersed like a mist pursued by the sun’s rays and overpowered by its heat. For our lifetime is the passing of a shadow; and our dying cannot be deferred because it is fixed with a seal; and no one returns. Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are real, and use the freshness of creation avidly. Let us have our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no springtime blossom pass us by; let us crown ourselves with rosebuds ere they wither. Let no meadow be free from our wantonness; everywhere let us leave tokens of our rejoicing, for this our portion is, and this our lot.” (Wisdom 2:1-9, NAB)

The wording of the quotation (in 15:45) is not the same as in Genesis 2:7, but the thought is preserved.

In 1 Corinthians 15:47, the oldest extant manuscript (P46 from about 200 CE) identifies the second man as “spiritual,” whereas numerous other later manuscripts add “the Lord” as the identifier.

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) and a number of later manuscripts contain an abbreviated reading for 1 Corinthians 15:54, omitting the words about the corruptible putting on incorruption.

The quotation from Isaiah 25:8 (in 15:54) conveys the thought of the text, but the wording is not the same as that of the extant text of the Septuagint, the Masoretic Text, or the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. According to the Septuagint, “prevailing death swallowed up,” but no object for the swallowing is included. The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah and other Hebrew manuscripts indicate that God has swallowed up death forever. Other Hebrew manuscripts may be rendered, “And he will swallow up death forever.”

In the case of the quotation from Hosea 13:14 (in 15:55), the extant Hebrew text does not convey the same meaning. It reads, “I [YHWH] will be your stings, death. I will be your cutting off, Sheol.” The extant Septuagint text is closer to the way Paul framed the questions. “Where [is] your vengeance, death? Where [is] your sting, Hades?” In 1 Corinthians 15:55, the word “death” appears instead of “Hades,” although a number of manuscripts (apparently through scribal conformity to the Septuagint) do say “Hades.” Instead of “vengeance,” “right,” “justice,” or “penalty” (*dike*), the Corinthians passage reads “victory” (*nike*). Additionally, the word order is different, but there are numerous manuscripts that reflect scribal assimilation to the Septuagint text. Whereas the wording of the Hebrew text and the Septuagint differ from Paul’s quotation, all agree in pointing to a marvellous liberation.



Ephesus viewed from the top of the theatre, towards the harbour. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the opposition he met in Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

16:1-4. The doctrine of stewardship

Verses 1-2a. The principles involved

The contribution for the “holy ones” was intended for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. In part, their poverty had resulted from the intense persecution to which they had repeatedly been subjected. (Compare Hebrews 10:32-34.) Regarding the contribution, Paul gave the same instructions to the Corinthians as he had to the congregations in the Roman province of Galatia, the boundaries of which were located in present-day Turkey. (16:1)

Verses 2b – 4. The reason and application

In keeping with their having prospered materially, Paul wanted them to set aside funds on the first day of the week for this contribution. Then, whenever he

would again be in Corinth, the funds would be available, with no need to take a collection during his visit. (16:2)

Paul exercised great care to assure that believers who contributed to the relief effort could be confident that those in need would receive aid. Upon his arrival in Corinth, he planned to entrust the contribution to those whom the Corinthians approved with letters and to send them to the believers in Jerusalem. If it proved to be appropriate for him also to go there, the designated Corinthian representatives would accompany him. (16:3, 4)



The track over which ships were hauled across the isthmus before the Corinth Canal was constructed

16:5-24 The illustration of brotherly service

Verse 5-14; Brotherly concern

Before his coming to Corinth in the province of Achaia, Paul intended to pass through Macedonia. (16:5) While in this province on the northern border of Achaia, he would be visiting communities of believers. (Compare 2 Corinthians 9:1-4.)

Paul had no specific plans about his future stay in Corinth. There was a possibility he would remain in the city for an extended period or even spend the winter there. Afterward he would have the Corinthians “send” him on his way

(likely meaning equipped for the trip) to the next location. The apostle's words ("wherever I may go") indicate that he did not then know where he would be heading immediately after his stay in Corinth. (16:6)

Not wanting his visit with the Corinthians to be too brief, he opted not to see them just when passing through the area but hoped to spend some time with them. Paul recognized that his personal plans were conditional, adding, "if the Lord permits." As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was sensitive to his leading and providential direction. (16:7)

Until Pentecost in the month of Sivan (mid-May to mid-June), Paul had decided to remain in Ephesus, a city on the coast of the Roman province of Asia in what is today part of western Turkey. (16:8) This was because "a large door" for activity in Christ's cause had opened up to him, but there were "many adversaries." According to the book of Acts (19:8-10, 24-27), opposition came from Jews who persisted in unbelief and from devotees of the goddess Artemis. (16:9; see the Notes section.)

Earlier in this letter, Paul had mentioned that he would be sending Timothy (4:17), and here again he referred to his fellow worker's coming. According to Acts 19:22, the apostle sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, where they visited congregations. This indicates that Paul planned for Timothy to arrive in Corinth after completing his mission in Macedonia and after the Corinthians had received the letter. (16:10)

The apostle appears to have been very concerned about the kind of reception the congregation would give to his fellow worker. Timothy was young, and so likely would not have been regarded with the same respect as an older man. Considering that among the Corinthians certain ones even spoke disparagingly of him, Paul had good reason to be apprehensive about what Timothy might face, especially from the arrogant proponents of false teaching. The apostle admonished the Corinthians to accept Timothy in a manner that would not cause him to become fearful (as would have been the case if they resisted his efforts to assist them, showed disregard for him on account of his youth, and proved to be argumentative). They were to keep in mind that he, like Paul, was doing the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This called for them to treat Timothy kindly as one who labored in advancing the interests of God's beloved Son. (16:10)

Paul urged the Corinthians not to look down on Timothy or to treat him as nothing. This implied that they should appreciate him as a brother in Christ and accord him love and respect. (16:11)

For the Corinthians to “send” Timothy on his way “in peace” could have meant for them to do so in a kindly manner, with their blessing, and supplied with necessities for the trip. Timothy would be traveling to rejoin Paul, who would be waiting for him. The reference to “brothers” could either apply to the ones with Timothy or to those with the apostle. Both meanings are found in translations. (16:11) “I am expecting him to come to me here with the other Christian brothers.” (J. B. Phillips) “I am looking for him to return to me together with the other followers.” (CEV) “I am waiting for him with our friends.” (REB) “The brothers and I are waiting for him.” (NJB)

Paul had strongly urged Apollos to accompany the “brothers,” probably meaning Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, on their trip back to Corinth. Apollos, though, did not want to visit the congregation then but intended to do so when he had an opportunity at another time. (16:12; see the Notes section.)

Serious problems had developed in the community of believers at Corinth, making Paul’s concluding exhortation most appropriate. The Corinthians needed to be awake, watchful, or vigilant to remain loyal to God and Christ, not deviating from a life of uprightness. It was essential for them to stand firm in the faith (their faith in Christ), resisting faithless persons like those who denied the resurrection hope. For the Corinthians “to be manly” would have meant for them to conduct themselves as mature persons with courage and strong conviction for what is right, not yielding to harmful influences. They needed to become strong as spiritual persons, not allowing impressive personalities, eloquent speech, or plausible arguments to sway them from the glad tidings about Christ. (16:13)

Nothing was to be exempt from the requirement for them to act “in love.” (16:14) For the Corinthians, this would have included rejecting the factious spirit that had developed among them, showing kindly consideration for the limitations of others by not insisting on personal rights, making use of the spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of all, and ending the abuses that had arisen in connection with the observance of the Lord’s supper.

Verses 15-24 Service and final salutation

To his Corinthian “brothers,” Paul spoke commendably about the household of Stephanas. The believers in Corinth knew the members of this household very well, for they were the “firstfruits of Achaia,” or the first ones in the province of Achaia to have accepted the good news about Christ. Understandably, therefore, they were among the few whom the apostle had personally baptized. (1:16; 16:15)

Of their own accord and not on the basis of anyone else's appointment, Stephanas and those of his household took upon themselves the "ministry to the holy ones." They must have busied themselves in serving fellow believers, selflessly expending themselves in rendering whatever spiritual or material aid they could in response to needs. (16:15)

The apostle admonished the Corinthians to submit to or to be supportive of persons like the members of the household of Stephanas and then added, "and to everyone working together and laboring." (16:16) The others may have been individuals who worked and toiled with persons like those of the household of Stephanas. A number of translations make this significance explicit. "I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them." (NRSV) "Be subordinate to such people and to everyone who works and toils with them." (NAB) "Follow the leading of people like these and anyone else who works and serves with them." (NCV) "I ask you in turn to put yourselves at the service of people like this and all that work with them in this arduous task." (NJB)

The Greek text, however, does not include a pronoun denoting "them." For this reason, the renderings of other translations reflect a more general significance. "I urge you to accept the leadership of people like them, of anyone who labours hard at our common task." (REB) "I ask you to obey leaders like them and to do the same for all others who work hard with you." (CEV)

The presence of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had proved to be a source of joy to Paul. These Corinthian brothers had made up for his being away from the rest of the congregation. (16:17) Doubtless because of the faith and love these men manifested, the apostle could say that they had refreshed his spirit. Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus must have represented the best of the community of believers in Corinth, with their presence having an uplifting effect on Paul's whole being. In view of their having raised his spirits, he spoke of them positively as also having refreshed the spirit of the Corinthians. Persons like these brothers deserved to be given recognition or to be highly valued and appreciated for their service to fellow believers. (16:18)

Paul extended the greetings of the congregations in the Roman province of Asia (in the western part of present-day Turkey). Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla, according to other manuscripts) were then in Ephesus with Paul. (16:8; compare Acts 18:18, 19, 24-26; 19:1.) As this couple had previously resided in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 2), they were known to the Corinthians. Aquila, Prisca, and the group of believers who met in their home for fellowship sent many greetings in

the Lord, or as persons who were at one with the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body. (16:19)

After telling the Corinthians that “all the brothers” greeted them, Paul continued, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” This would have been a kiss that reflected their relationship as beloved fellow children of God. (16:20)

Paul customarily dictated his letters. To indicate that this letter was indeed from him, he wrote the greeting with “his own hand.” (16:21)

Affection for the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed by the love believers have for one another. To treat a fellow child of God in a loveless manner is a grave sin. It may be because certain ones among the Corinthians had seriously failed in showing love that the apostle included the strong expression, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be anathema [accursed].” (16:22)

Devoted disciples of God’s Son yearn for his return and their being united with him. This thought would be conveyed when the Semitic expression in Paul’s letter is transliterated as *Marana tha* (“O Lord, come.”) When, however, the expression is understood to be *Maran atha*, it would be a declaration of faith, “Our Lord has come.” (16:22)

Paul concluded his letter with a prayerful expression and the assurance of his own love. “The favour of the Lord Jesus [Christ, included in other manuscripts] [be] with you. My love [be] with all of you in Christ Jesus. [Amen (So be it) in numerous manuscripts.]” The “favour,” grace, or unmerited or unearned kindness would include all the aid and guidance the Son of God gives to his disciples. Although numerous problems had arisen in Corinth and much needed to be corrected, the apostle did not weaken in his love for the community of believers there. He loved all who were “in Christ,” fellow members of his body and children of God. (16:23, 24)

Notes:

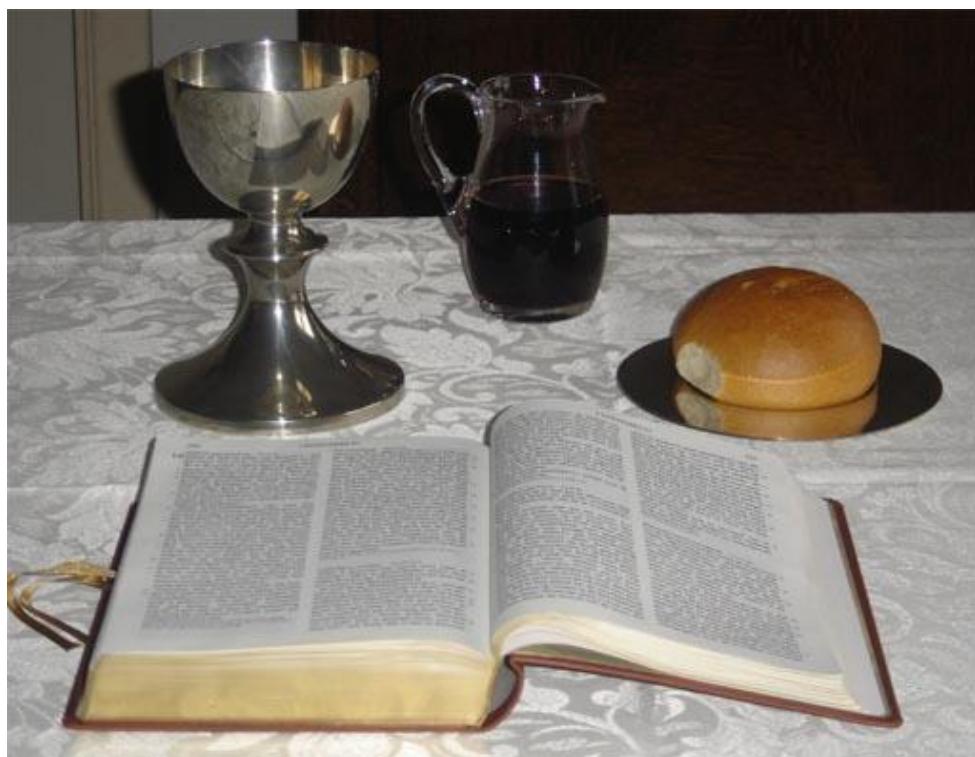
The reference to “adversaries” (in 16:9) does not include the incident involving the silversmith Demetrius. Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia before Demetrius stirred up his fellow silversmiths against Paul as a threat to their profitable trade in fashioning silver shrines of Artemis, precipitating a riot in the theater of Ephesus. (Acts 19:22-40)

The letter does not disclose why Apollos refused to act on the apostle’s entreaty to go to Corinth. (16:12) Paul respected his fellow worker’s decision to visit the congregation at his own discretion. The apostle’s example contrasts sharply with

that of many in positions of power within various religious movements. Although having no divinely granted apostolic authority as did Paul, they think nothing of exercising control and issuing commands in matters of this nature.

In the Greek text, the word “will” (16:12) is not preceded by the pronoun “his.” The inclusion of this pronoun would have made the application to the will of Apollos very specific. Its absence has caused some to conclude that it may have been God’s will or the Lord’s will for Apollos not to visit the Corinthian congregation at that time. It is, however, very unlikely for Paul not to have identified the will as being that of God or that of the Lord Jesus Christ if this had been his intended meaning, and nothing in the context implies such a significance.

After verse 24, numerous manuscripts include a subscription indicating that the letter is for the Corinthians. There are also manuscripts that mention that the letter was written from Ephesus, whereas others say that it was written from Philippi (which the internal evidence does not support as the location).



The celebrant of the Lord's Supper says:

In the beginning, O Lord, you created us for yourself. But even though we have fallen through our disobedience to sin and death, you in your infinite mercy, grace, and love sent your only begotten Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, to live among us as a man, born of a virgin. He suffered every hardship and adversity,

every trial, trouble, tribulation, and temptation that we face—except without sin. Finally, He stretched out His arms upon the cross in perfect obedience to your will and offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

On the night on which our Lord Jesus was given over to suffering and death through the betrayal of a friend, He took bread, and after He had blessed it and given thanks to you for it, O Lord, He gave it to His disciples and said, “**Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you.**” After the supper, he took the cup, and after He had blessed it and given thanks to you for it, O Lord, He said, “**Drink of this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the remission of your sins and the sins of the whole world.**”

Therefore, as often as we eat this bread and drink of this cup, we eat the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We proclaim His death until He comes again. Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ is coming again!

The celebrant continues:

Lord Holy Spirit, you are the giver of life in whom we live and move and have our being; consecrate this bread and wine to be, for us, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and consecrate us, O Lord, to partake of this holy meal. (*Additional wording can go here.*) All this we ask, Lord Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the glory of His Father, Amen. Therefore we pray the prayer our Lord taught us, saying:

The Lord’s Prayer

For the full Lord’s Supper Liturgy (Holy Eucharist):

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/19706747/Ecumenical-Eucharist-Liturgies-in-Dutch-French-and-English>

1 CORINTHIANS QUESTIONNAIRE

**THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE
CORINTHIANS**

CHAPTER 1-16

Now that we have completed our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, let us test what we have learned. This is a 16 question (1 for each chapter) multiple choice test. There may be more than one answer for a question. You'll find the answers at the bottom of the page.

1.) Who has God called in this world to confound the wise?

- A. The mighty
- B. Those who are educated
- C. The foolish
- D. The weak

2.) Why have we received the spirit which is of God?

- A. So we can know all things
- B. So we might know the things that are freely given to us from God
- C. So we can be happy all the time
- D. So we will never sin again

3.) What would you say is the main point that Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthians at the beginning of his letter?

- A. The Corinthians were divided, and Paul was encouraging them to be unified
- B. That Jesus didn't send Paul to baptize them
- C. Don't be lazy
- D. If you're foolish, you're okey dokey in God's eyes

4.) Which of these statements are true?

- A. Some people are better than others
- B. The most important thing for a steward of the Lord is faith
- C. It's good to judge yourself, but nobody else
- D. Some gifts come from God, but some things we develop on our own

5.) Why did Paul advise the Corinthians to cast out fornicators from their congregation?

- A. Because in the body of Christ (in the church), all are united, or as one. Letting a fornicator remain, is accepting that behavior, so God will have to deal with everybody
- B. When a person is cast out from the congregation, they are away from God, and alone with the enemy, which makes a person want to seek forgiveness and get back into God's good graces
- C. A little leaven, leavens the whole lump. The whole congregation stands in danger of becoming fornicators
- D. All of the above

6.) When there are conflicts within the church, who should settle these disputes?

- A. The pastor

- B. The eldest
- C. Everyone
- D. Those who are least esteemed in the church should judge them

7.) Which of these statements is true?

- A. An unbelieving husband and children can be saved by a believing wife
- B. God honors all marriage licenses
- C. In general, married people tend to be concerned more about worldly things than God.
- D. Paul thinks divorce is better than marriage

8.) It's not a sin to eat meat offered to idols

- A. If you believe it's a sin
- B. If you believe in idols
- C. If you didn't know it was offered to idols
- D. If you tempt another person by doing so

9.) Paul

- A. was under the law
- B. was without law
- C. was weak
- D. became all of these to gain them for Christ

10.) Which of these statements are true?

- A. God causes all things to happen
- B. God won't allow you to be tempted more than you can handle
- C. Those who are strong are never affected by temptation
- D. The children of Israel were tempted and punished in the wilderness to be examples to us.

11.) You should cover your head

- A. If you're a woman, during prayer or prophesying
- B. If you're a man, during prayer or prophesying
- C. By wearing your hair long if you're a woman
- D. If you believe you should, but in the churches of God, there is no such custom

12.) Spiritual gifts are

- A. Bestowed upon you by the Holy Spirit
- B. Different in different people, but they all work together, unitedly
- C. One just as important as another
- D. All of the above

13.) Love

- A. Contains different qualities that should be modified for different situations
- B. Enhances your other spiritual gifts
- C. Never fails

D. Is second to faith and hope

14.) Speaking in tongues

- A. Is the Holy Spirit, speaking to another person, through you, in the other persons language
- B. Happens when you want it to
- C. Is better than prophesying
- D. Is necessary for salvation

15.) Which of these statements are true?

- A. Jesus is the only person who will ever be resurrected
- B. We will be raised at the last seal
- C. When you're resurrected, you will change from mortal to immortal
- D. Following the law is more important than believing in the resurrection

16.) Paul

- A. Was embarrassed to ask for money
- B. Was considerate about his manner of collecting money
- C. Needed money for his trip to Jerusalem
- D. Advised the Corinthians each to contribute ten percent of their earnings to the saints in Jerusalem because of the worldwide dearth.

1 CORINTHIANS TEST ANSWERS

1. C&D
2. B
3. A
4. B
5. D
6. D
7. A&C
8. C&D
9. A, B, C, &D
10. B&D
11. D
12. D
13. B&C
14. A
15. C
16. B



Macedonia from which Paul probably wrote 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:1-24

1:11-11. Divine comfort and its purpose

Verses 1-7. God's comfort abounding in times of trouble

This letter starts much like 1 Corinthians. The sender identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God’s will.” It was Jesus Christ who chose him to be an apostle or “one sent forth,” commissioning him to proclaim the good news. His being chosen for this purpose accorded with God’s will, indicating that, ultimately, his authority as an apostle came from the Father and was an expression of his unearned favour. (1:1)

Paul associated Timothy with himself, for the Corinthians knew his young fellow worker well. In referring to him as “the brother” (1:1), the apostle may have expressed his high regard for him as “the brother” without equal. (Compare Philippians 2:19-22.) As Sothenes is likewise called “the brother” (in 1 Corinthians 1:1), the definite article “the” does not necessarily imply this significance.

Paul identified the community of believers in Corinth as the “congregation of God.” It belonged to God because of having been purchased with the blood of his unique Son. (Compare Acts 20:28.) The Corinthian believers were not the

only ones to whom the letter was addressed, for the apostle included “all the holy ones” residing in Achaia. (1:1) Among these “holy ones” or God’s cleansed people by reason of their faith in Christ were believers in Athens and Cenchreae. (Acts 17:34; Romans 16:1)

“Favour,” unmerited or unearned kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace of which God and Christ are the source would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity. Their sense of well-being and security would stem from knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and affliction. (1:2)

No verb follows the adjective “blessed,” and so the meaning can be either “blessed is” or “blessed be.” When (as appears likely) Paul’s words are regarded as an expression of praise for what God had done for him, the preferred rendering would be, “blessed is.” (Compare 2 Corinthians 11:31.) The word *kai* basically means “and,” which would signify that the one being blessed or praised is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:3)

A number of translations do not have the apostle refer to the Father as the “God” of Jesus Christ, either rendering the words according to another possible meaning for *kai* or leaving the conjunction untranslated. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (KJV) “Thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (J. B. Phillips) “Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” (CEV) Ephesians 1:17, however, is very specific in referring to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and so there is sound reason for rendering *kai* as “and” in 2 Corinthians 1:3. (See the Notes section.)

The first person plural “we” may refer to Paul in an editorial sense, apply to him and his fellow workers, or include the apostle and believers throughout Achaia. He spoke of God as the one “who comforts us in all our distress.” Whatever tribulation, oppression, or affliction believers might face, they could be certain that the heavenly Father would console them, either by strengthening them to endure or by delivering them from the difficult circumstances. It would then be possible for them to console others in whatever type of distress they might be experiencing or may yet face. All who have shared in the comfort God gives can impart this comfort to other afflicted ones, sharing with them what the heavenly Father has done for them and thus encouraging those in distress that they, too, will be sustained and strengthened. (1:4)

Paul, his close associates, and other believers suffered much. It was no exaggeration on his part to say that sufferings “abounded” or overflowed. “For

just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also, through Christ, our comfort abounds.” (1:5)

Believers are members of Christ’s body and are at one with him as their head, and so their sufferings are his sufferings. He considers their distress as his own. (Compare Matthew 25:44, 45.) Although their sufferings may overflow, the comfort they receive through him would also be abundant. Nothing would be lacking in the aid they would receive through Christ. They would be sustained in their affliction and granted the needed strength to endure, and so his help and that of his Father would prove to be abundant consolation. (1:5)

The distress Paul and his close associates experienced was for the “comfort and salvation” of the believers to whom he sent his letter. Because of what he personally had been able to endure with divine aid, he was in a position to console fellow believers who faced difficult circumstances. When seeing how Paul had been sustained and strengthened, they would be encouraged to look with confidence to the aid that would come to them through Christ. This would contribute to their course of faithful endurance, with salvation as the ultimate result. The attainment of final salvation would mean that they would be completely freed from sin and united with Christ as sinless sons of God. (1:6)

Members of Christ’s body, like the parts of the physical body, share in the suffering and comfort of fellow believers. (Compare 1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 10:32-34.) So, when Paul and his close associates were comforted, the Corinthians and other believers in Achaia would be comforted upon witnessing the evidence of what God and Christ had done in strengthening their brothers. Then, when those to whom Paul wrote experienced the sufferings he and others did and endured patiently with unwavering faith in God and Christ, they would come to be recipients of the same comfort. (1:6)

In his hope that believers in Achaia would faithfully endure distress, Paul was sure or unwavering. He knew or was certain that just as they were “sharers of the sufferings,” they would also be participants in “the comfort.” Paul did not doubt that God and Christ would come to the aid of believers in their time of distress, providing them with the consolation they needed to bear up patiently. (1:7)

Verses 8-11. Thanksgiving for recent deliverance

The apostle wanted his “brothers” or fellow believers in Corinth and elsewhere in Achaia to know (literally, “not to be ignorant”) about the distress that had befallen him in the Roman province of Asia (in what is today the western part of

Turkey). He spoke of the incident in the first person plural and so could have meant that Timothy and possibly others faced the same distress. On the other hand, his words may be understood as applying only to himself (as an editorial “we”). Excessively burdened beyond his strength by the distressing development, Paul felt that his life would end. (1:8)

Within himself he sensed that he had received a death sentence. Through this experience, he had impressed on him that he could not trust in himself or rely on his own strength to endure. His only option was to trust in God who “raises the dead.” (1:9)

So imminent did his own death appear to be that his deliverance from the threatening situation was comparable to a resurrection. According to numerous manuscripts, he said that God had rescued him from “so great a death” (so great a mortal peril) and would continue to do so. In expression of his unwavering confidence, Paul, with reference to God, added, “in whom we have hoped that he will yet rescue us [again].” (1:10)

With their supplications, believers in Achaia could “work with” or assist Paul (and also his close associates) in the hardships he (or he and they) faced. The apostle did not doubt that the intense prayer for him (or for him and his close associates) would receive a favourable response. As a consequence of the divine aid he (or he and his fellow workers) would graciously be granted, many would give thanks to God. (1:11)

1:12-2:13 Testimony of sincerity

Verses 1:12-24 Paul’s reason for joy

For Paul, his “boasting,” or the basis for a proper pride, was the manner in which he had conducted himself in the world or the human sphere of life, but particularly toward the Corinthians and others in Achaia. His conscience testified to his having acted in “sincerity” (*haplótes*) and “godly purity” or “godly honesty” (literally, “purity [*eilikríneia*] of God”). He had shunned “fleshly wisdom,” the kind of wisdom that depended on eloquence and impressive bearing to persuade others, but relied fully on God’s favour, or on all that had been divinely granted to him in expression of unearned kindness. (1:12; see the Notes section.)

The manner in which Paul expressed himself indicates that his detractors called his sincerity and purity of motive into question, claiming that he said one thing but then did another. His next words counter this false claim. “For we are not writing to you things other than you can read or also understand, but which I

hope you will understand fully [literally, until the end]." There were no hidden meanings in what the apostle had written. His letter was meant to be taken at face value and to be understood by everyone to whom it had been sent. (1:13)

On account of the problems that had arisen in the congregation at Corinth, it was only in "part" or to "an extent" that the Corinthians understood or recognized that Paul rightly was an object for their boasting. They could properly take pride in him on account of his devoted service for them. Likewise, "in the day of the Lord Jesus," or at the time of his glorious return as king and judge, the Corinthians would be the object of Paul's boasting. Confidently, he looked forward to the joy and satisfaction he would experience. His labor for the Corinthians would not have been in vain, for they would then be united with Christ as approved children of God. Paul's loving assurance respecting them should have caused them to re-evaluate their thinking about him and to take pride in him, not just in part, but to the full extent that he deserved. (1:14; see the Notes section.)

In view of his confidence about the future of the Corinthians in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, he had previously wanted to come to them. Paul spoke of his planned visitation as being for their "second favour" or, according to other manuscripts, their "second joy." Possibly he meant that the first favour or joy proved to be when they became believers at the time of his first visit, whereas the second favour or joy would be his future return. The next verse, however, suggests that the reference may be to two future visits. This would mean that the first joy refers to a prospective visit on his way to Macedonia, and the second joy would relate to the future visit upon his return from Macedonia. Paul's desire had been for the Corinthians to "send" him on his way to Judea (probably meaning to send him equipped for the trip and with their blessing). The purpose of the journey to Judea would have been to take the collection from the various congregations to the poor believers in Jerusalem. (1:15, 16; see the Notes section regarding verse 15.)

Paul, though, did not visit the Corinthians twice as he had intended. His detractors appear to have used this against him, claiming that he could not be trusted. By means of questions, the apostle countered the personal attacks. "So planning this, did I then deal with lightness? Or [with reference to] whatever things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, so that with me there might be, 'Yes, yes,' and 'No, no'?" These rhetorical questions indicated that he had not been fickle, irresponsible, or vacillating. He had been serious when he determined to visit the Corinthians. The apostle did not plan "according to the flesh," or with the undependability that is often associated with sinful human nature. When saying "Yes," he did not at the same time mean "No." (1:17)

By God's will, Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to impugn the apostle's trustworthiness would also question God's reliability as the one who had commissioned him through his Son. Seemingly, for this reason, Paul focused on God's faithfulness, trustworthiness, or dependability, saying, "But God is faithful." Therefore, the "word" of the one whom God had willed to be an apostle could not be "Yes" and, at the same time, "No." So Paul's "word" to the Corinthians deserved to be trusted. (1:18)

When he first proclaimed the glad tidings about Christ in Corinth, Silas and Timothy laboured with him. (Acts 15:40; 16:1-3) The "Son of God, Jesus Christ," the one who was the focus of their proclamation among the Corinthians, "did not become 'Yes and No,' but 'Yes' [is that which] has become in him. For as many as [there are of] God's promises, [they are] 'Yes' in him. Therefore, also through him, the 'Amen' [is said] to God, to [his] glory through us." (1:19, 20)

The Son of God had been revealed to the Corinthians as completely trustworthy. Nothing about Jesus gave even the slightest hint that a "Yes" might actually be a "No." For Paul to have been fickle respecting his word would have been inconsistent with what he had taught the Corinthians about Christ. (1:19)

Through his sacrificial death in faithfulness, the Son of God assured that every one of his Father's promises would be fulfilled, making him the means for a "Yes" to all of them. Rightly, then, prayers are directed to the Father in Jesus' name or in recognition of his exalted position as the Lord who laid down his life and made possible the fulfilment of all of God's promises. Through Christ, the concluding "Amen" (so be it) is expressed. This would be to God's glory, for the "Amen" is said as an expression of loyal submission to his will that Jesus Christ be acknowledged as the highly exalted Lord over all. (Compare Philippians 2:9-11.) The Corinthians had been led to say the "Amen" to God's glory or praise through the preaching of Paul, Silas and Timothy. It would have been completely inconsistent for Paul, who had been instrumental in helping others to give glory to God for his faithfulness, to be untrustworthy as a divinely chosen apostle. (1:20; see the Notes section.)

God is the one who "establishes" (*bebaióo*) believers "in Christ." The Father made it possible for Paul, Silas and Timothy together with the community of believers in Corinth to be established or strengthened in their relationship of oneness with his Son and had anointed them with his spirit, thereby adopting them as his approved sons or children. In view of this joint relationship, Paul could not have been untrustworthy when formulating his plans to visit the Corinthians. (1:21; see the Notes section)

Continuing to comment on what God had done, Paul said, He “also has sealed us and given the deposit [*arrabón*] of the spirit in our hearts.” This sealing is with the spirit and identifies the sealed ones as belonging to the Father as his approved children in his service. The term *arrabón* denotes the “first instalment,” “pledge,” or “down payment.” The expression “deposit of the spirit” identifies the spirit as that “first instalment,” with the genitive noun (“of the spirit”) being used as an appositive. This initial instalment assures that believers will enjoy all the future privileges and blessings they will receive upon coming to have the glorified sinless state of God’s children as their inheritance. In their hearts or their inmost selves, they have an awareness of the presence and operation of the spirit (the deposit), for their lives are being transformed to conform ever closer to the image of their heavenly Father and his Son. (1:22)

With a solemn oath, Paul set forth the reason for his change in plans, “But I call upon God as witness against my soul, [It was] to spare you that I did not yet come to Corinth.” The apostle thus invoked God as his witness against himself if he did not speak the truth. His not having come to Corinth gave the Corinthians time to repent and amend their ways so as to be spared the severe discipline he would have needed to administer if he had arrived earlier. So it was for their benefit that he had not come. (1:23)

Paul had apostolic authority to discipline as with a rod (1 Corinthians 4:21), but he did not claim to be a lord or master over their faith nor were his close associates, Silas and Timothy, such masters. The Corinthians were accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ. As far as their faith was concerned, they were “standing” or grounded in the faith that centred on the Son of God, but they needed to let this faith have greater influence in their lives. They also merited correction that would benefit them. As the divinely appointed apostle, Paul discharged his responsibility to assist them and did so out of deep love for them. Accordingly, he, Silas and Timothy proved to be “fellow workers” for their joy. It would be the joy resulting from conducting themselves as obedient children of God. The corrective admonition directed to the Corinthians was given to promote this joy. (1:24)

Notes:

From verses 3 through 14, Paul used the pronoun “we” or the first person plural verbs. It is not possible to determine whom he may have meant to include or whether he was merely using the editorial “we” with reference to himself. In every case, however, the “we” either included Paul or applied exclusively to him.

The first word of the Greek text (in 1:9) is *allá*, which often denotes a strong contrast and can be rendered “but.” In this context, though, the term serves as an indicator of emphasis regarding what Paul had experienced and may be rendered “indeed” or “in fact.”

The expression “so great a” (in 1:10) is a rendering of the singular form of the Greek adjective *pelíkos* and precedes the noun meaning “death.” According to the oldest extant Greek manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), both words are plural and have been understood to mean “such great mortal dangers.”

After the reference to “supplication” (in 1:11), the Greek text is not easy to follow. A literal rendering would be, “that from many faces the [gracious] gift to us, through many thanks might be given for us [you, according to other manuscripts].” The “gift” would be the help or consolation Paul (or Paul and his fellow workers) would receive as a result of the many faces raised to God in prayer. Once it became evident that the prayer of the many had been answered, many would be moved to thank God.

Instead of a form of *haplótes* (in verse 12), denoting “sincerity,” “simplicity,” or “singleness,” many manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200 CE), contain a form of *hagiótes*, meaning “holiness” or “purity.” The noun *eilikríneia* conveys the thought of being free from pretence and is descriptive of honesty and purity in motive.

In their renderings of verse 12, translations vary as to whether the boasting relates to the conscience or to the conduct. “There is one thing we are proud of: our conscience shows us that in our dealings with others, and above all in our dealings with you, our conduct has been governed by a devout and godly sincerity, by the grace of God and not by worldly wisdom.” (REB) “We can be proud of our clear conscience. We have always lived honestly and sincerely, especially when we were with you. And we were guided by God’s wonderful kindness instead of by the wisdom of this world.” (CEV) “Now it is a matter of pride to us—endorsed by our conscience—that our activities in this world, particularly our dealings with you, have been absolutely aboveboard and sincere before God. They have not been marked by any worldly wisdom, but by the grace of God.” (J. B. Phillips) “This is what we are proud of, and I can say it with a clear conscience: In everything we have done in the world, and especially with you, we have had an honest and sincere heart from God. We did this by God’s grace, not by the kind of wisdom the world has.” (NCV) It appears preferable to understand the phrase about the conscience as affirming (“the testimony of our conscience”) the laudable conduct and not as focusing on the good conscience as the object of the boasting.

In verse 14, manuscript readings vary, with many saying “the day of the Lord Jesus” and others including the word “our” (“in the day of our Lord Jesus”).

A number of translations (in verse 14) are explicit in drawing a distinction between what Paul hoped the Corinthians would come to feel about him and his future pride in them at the time of Christ’s return, and this appears to be the preferable significance. “It is my hope that, just as you have already understood us partially, so you will understand fully that you can be as proud of us as we shall be of you when the Day of our Lord Jesus comes.” (NJB) “And I hope that as you have understood some things about us, you may come to know everything about us. Then you can be proud of us, as we will be proud of you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.” (NCV) “You can be honestly proud of us as we shall be of you on the day when Christ reveals all secrets.” (J. B. Phillips)

Other translations represent the Corinthians as also taking pride in Paul on the day of the Lord. “As you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.” (NRSV) “You do understand us in some measure, and I hope you will come to understand fully that you have as much reason to be proud of us, as we of you, on the day of our Lord Jesus.” (REB) “Then when our Lord Jesus returns, you can be as proud of us as we are of you.” (CEV)

The Greek word that basically means “formerly” or “previously” is *próteros*. In verse 15, a number of translations have rendered this term as “first,” and the expressions “second joy” and “second favour” (depending on which manuscript evidence is chosen as the basis for the translation) also have been translated in a variety of ways. Numerous translations make the reference to two future visits explicit, but differences may be noted in the way the words of verse 15 are interpreted. “Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favour.” (NRSV) “It was because I felt so confident about all this that I had intended to come first of all to you and give you the benefit of a double visit.” (REB) “Trusting you, and believing that you trusted us, our original plan was to pay you a visit first, and give you a double ‘treat.’” (J. B. Phillips) “I was so sure of all this that I made plans to visit you first so you could be blessed twice.” (NCV) “I was so sure of your pride in us that I had planned to visit you first of all. In this way you would have the blessing of two visits from me.” (CEV)

Whereas we today cannot be certain about the exact meaning of Paul’s words, they were understood by the recipients of the letter. The words do not have the

same relevance to us, making any uncertainty about their significance immaterial.

In verse 20, the phrase about the “Amen” literally reads, “through him the Amen to God toward glory through us.” The absence of a verb has led translators to interpret the reference to be to the expressions made either by believers or Christ. “For this reason it is through him that we say the ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God.” (NRSV) “Through him can be said the final Amen, to the glory of God.” (J. B. Phillips) “That’s why we have Christ to say ‘Amen’ for us to the glory of God.” (CEV) If Paul had meant Christ as saying the “Amen,” he would surely have been more specific. So there is good reason to regard this interpretive rendering as questionable.

The Greek verb *bebaióo* can mean “establish,” “strengthen,” “confirm,” or “guarantee.” Based on the meaning they have chosen, translators vary in their renderings of verse 21. “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us.” (NRSV) “We owe our position in Christ to this God of positive promise: it is he who has consecrated us to this special work.” (J. B. Phillips) “And if you and we belong to Christ, guaranteed as his and anointed, it is all God’s doing.” (REB) “And so God makes it possible for you and us to stand firmly together with Christ. God is also the one who chose us.” (CEV) “Remember, God is the One who makes you and us strong in Christ. God made us his chosen people.” (NCV)



The site of Ancient Corinth

2 Corinthians 2: 1-17

2:1-13. Paul's desire to visit them in joy.

Paul continued to explain why he had not made another visit to Corinth, saying, “For [But, according to other manuscripts] this I had decided, not again in sadness to come to you.” (2:1) The Corinthians would have known exactly what the apostle meant, but we today cannot be certain. Paul’s words may mean that, besides the initial visit when the community of believers came into existence, he had returned to Corinth. This second visit had occasioned sadness on account of problems that had arisen among the believers, and Paul did not want to repeat such a visit. Numerous translations convey this significance. “So I made up my mind that my next visit to you must not be another painful one.” (REB) “I have decided not to make my next visit with you so painful.” (CEV) “So I decided that my next visit to you would not be another one to make you sad.” (NCV) “And I made up my mind that I would not pay you another painful visit.” (J. B. Phillips)

No mention of a painful visit is included in the book of Acts. This would not rule out there having been such a visit, for one should not expect a comparatively short account to include every detail. At the same time, with no confirmatory details in the book of Acts, one cannot be sure whether Paul made a painful visit before or after writing 1 Corinthians.

On the other hand, there are ways in which to understand the apostle’s words that would not point to his having made a second visit. Although it would not be following the natural word order, the Greek text could be understood to mean that Paul had decided not to make his next visit one that would bring sadness. Another possibility would be that the apostle had resolved not to return to Corinth while he was saddened about the troublesome developments among the believers.

There is no uncertainty about the fact that Paul wanted to avoid having his coming to Corinth occasion sadness. “For,” as he continued, “if I sadden you, then who is the one to cheer me if not the one whom I have saddened?” His visit would have required administering strong discipline, resulting in sadness to the community of believers. So the source of any joy Paul would have experienced would have come from the very ones whom he had saddened. (2:2)

The apostle “wrote” what he did so that he, upon his arrival in Corinth, would not be saddened by those respecting whom he wanted to rejoice. In the phrase “I wrote this very thing,” Paul’s use of the aorist tense for the Greek verb *grápho*

(rendered as a past tense in English [wrote]), may be understood from the standpoint of the recipients of the letter. Another possibility is that his reference is to a severe letter (either 1 Corinthians or another letter that has not been preserved) he had previously written to them. (Compare 2 Corinthians 7:8; 10:9, 10.) Although the Corinthians had conducted themselves in a manner that left much to be desired, the apostle had confidence they would make the required changes that would bring him joy. His joy would then be a joy in which they would be participants. (2:3)

In a state of distress and anguish, Paul had written to the Corinthians. At “heart” or in his inmost self, he was greatly troubled about the undesirable condition existing among them. While writing, he shed many tears. His objective had not been to sadden them but to let them know the abundant love he had for them. The apostle’s deep concern for the Corinthians had its source in love, as he wanted them to be found approved children of God. (2:4)

Paul next focused on the one who had been the reason for sadness, pain, or distress. “But if anyone has saddened, he has not saddened me, but in part (not to overburden [*epibaréo*]) all of you.” The context is not specific in identifying the person responsible for causing grief. Based on 1 Corinthians 5:1, the reference may be to the incestuous man. The manner in which the apostle expressed himself, however, has given rise to the view that the wrongdoer was one who had caused distress for Paul, possibly by defiantly rejecting his apostolic authority in a direct confrontation with him or with a close associate whom he had sent. (2:5; see the Notes section.)

When saying that the wrongdoer had not saddened him, Paul indicated that he had not acted out of personal interests when directing the Corinthians to take action against the individual. It appears that the apostle regarded himself as part of the community of believers and so represented the greater grief as having affected the Corinthian congregation. The expression “in part” (literally, “from part”) may be variously understood. Three of a number of possible meanings are: (1) The wrongdoer had caused sadness to an extent for the Corinthian believers. (2) He had saddened them but not all of them to the same degree. (3) He had pained many, but not all of the members of the congregation. (2:5)

In the context of what Paul did not want to do, the “overburdening” could relate to doing so with words. This would mean that he did not wish to say too much. The Greek word *epibaréo* has also been understood to mean “exaggerate” or “be too severe.” (2:5) These meanings are reflected in the renderings of modern translations. *Hat aber jemand Betrübnis verursacht, so hat er nicht mich betrübt, sondern zum Teil — damit ich nicht zu viel sage — euch alle.* (Has someone

caused sadness, then he has not saddened me, but in part — that I might not say too much — all of you.) (Schlachter [German]) “If someone among you has brought sorrow, he has not made me as sad as he has all of you. I say this so I may not make it hard for you.” (NLT) “But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent — not to exaggerate it — to all of you.” (NRSV) “If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent — not to put it too severely.” (NIV) “Any injury that has been done has not been done to me; to some extent (I do not want to make too much of it) it has been done to you all.” (REB) “Someone there among you has caused sadness, not to me, but to all of you. I mean he caused sadness to all in some way. (I do not want to make it sound worse than it really is). (NCV)

Not all of the Corinthians had concurred with the disapproval expressed against the wrongdoer. But Paul felt that the censure of the majority had been sufficient to attain the desired objective. Those who had shown disrespect for the apostle must have been the minority. (2:6)

The man responsible for causing grief had repented, and Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive and comfort him. Their treating him kindly would prevent his becoming overwhelmed (literally, “swallowed up”) with great sorrow, which could have included his being burdened by feelings of guilt and divine rejection. (2:7)

In order to assure the repentant man that he was again a part of the community of believers, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to confirm their love for him. (2:8) The previous directive the apostle had written about this wrongdoer served to test the Corinthians, making it possible for him “know” or to determine whether they were obedient in everything. This obedience doubtless meant submissive response to everything pertaining to Paul’s rightful exercise of apostolic authority. (2:9)

As far as the apostle was concerned, anything the congregation in Corinth would forgive he would also forgive. Thus he revealed that he regarded himself as a part of the same community of believers. When it came to Paul’s forgiveness of anything, whenever he extended it, he did so for the sake of the Corinthians “in the presence [literally, face] of Christ.” He could speak of acting for their sake because his forgiveness had as its focus the spiritual welfare of the congregation. He extended forgiveness as one who loyally submitted to Christ and so spoke of having forgiven in his presence. (2:10)

A failure to forgive a repentant sinner and to refuse to show love to him would serve the interests of Satan. The repentant individual could be lost to the congregation. Believing himself to be rejected as disapproved and without forgiveness, the person could sink into a state of despair and take up a life like those in a state of alienation from God. In that case, the congregation, through its harshness, would have fallen into Satan's trap, for his designs (as the Corinthians knew) were intended to cause believers to experience spiritual ruin. (2:11)

Commenting on his personal situation, Paul referred to his arrival in Troas (a major seaport on the northwest coast of Asia Minor) for the purpose of declaring the glad tidings of Christ. Even though a door had opened up to him "in the Lord," or the opportunity proved to be favourable for advancing the cause of the Son of God, the apostle found himself in a state of great anxiety. His "spirit" or mind gave him no rest. In Troas, he had expected to meet Titus, whom he had sent to Corinth and from whom he wanted to learn about the response of the Corinthians, but Titus had not arrived. So great was Paul's concern about the Corinthians that he decided to leave Troas and go to Macedonia, apparently hoping to meet Titus who would have followed the land route from Corinth in the province of Achaia northward through the province of Macedonia. (2:12, 13)

2:14-17. The glory of the ministry – its triumph

Verse 14. The Christian's march of triumph

Paul did finally meet Titus somewhere in Macedonia and was greatly comforted upon learning about the favourable response of the congregation in Corinth. (7:5-7) This and probably also other positive developments in the furtherance of Christ's cause moved Paul to thank God. The apostle then likened God's action to a procession that celebrated the triumph of a Roman army. "[He], in Christ, always leads us in triumph [*thriambeúo*] and, through us, makes manifest the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place." (2:14)

In this context, the Greek verb *thriambeúo* has been understood to mean either "to lead in a triumphal procession" or "to lead in triumph." The ancient Roman triumphal processions included both the captives and the victorious troops. For the captives, the fragrant incense that was burned along the route often portended death, whereas its aroma heralded the future honours to be granted to the triumphant warriors. In view of Paul's expression of thanks to God, it is more likely that he thought of himself as a sharer in the victory and not as Christ's captive in the triumphal procession. If the apostle's use of "we" is to be regarded as a plural (and not as an editorial "we"), he meant also to include his

close associates. Both the apostle and his fellow workers were “in Christ” or at one with him as members of his body. (2:14)

In relation to knowledge, the pronoun “him” could apply either to God or to Christ. (2:14) Both meanings are found in modern translations. “God also helps us spread the knowledge about Christ everywhere, and this knowledge is like the smell of perfume.” (CEV) “Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume.” (NLT) “Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on his own triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume!” (J. B. Phillips) “But thanks be to God who always gives us in Christ a part in his triumphal procession, and through us is spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of himself.” (NJB)

Verses 15-17. The Christian’s powerful influence

Paul proved to be a vessel containing the vital knowledge about both the Father and his Son. Through the apostle (and also his fellow workers), God spread this knowledge like a fragrant incense. From the standpoint of the message, Paul could speak of himself (and also his close associates) as a being a “fragrance of Christ” to God among those who were being saved and among those who were perishing. The message itself related to Christ and so could be called a “fragrance of Christ.” It was the message God wanted to be spread far and wide in its unadulterated form and, therefore, the bearers of this message were a pleasing fragrance to him. To those who responded in faith, the bearers of the message proved to be like a sweet-smelling incense. Through the messengers, they had learned about how they could be forgiven of their sins and be saved or liberated from condemnation. The messengers were also a fragrance to those who were perishing because of their remaining in a state of condemnation on account of unbelief. (2:15)

The “fragrance of Christ” had the opposite effect on those who were being saved and on those who were perishing. Paul described the aroma as being “from death to death” for those who were perishing and as being “from life to life” for those who were being saved. Unbelievers perceived nothing positive in the message, for it revealed them to be condemned sinners with death in view. Those who believed found it to be a fragrance that had its source in life and led to their being liberated from sin and coming to enjoy a newness of life as God’s approved children. (2:16)

The apostle then raised the question, “And who is fit [*hikanós*] for these things?” In this context, the Greek word *hikanós* could mean “sufficient,” “adequate,”

“fit,” “competent,” or “qualified” and apparently relates to being in a position to function as a “fragrance of Christ.” (2:16) The implied answer could be that Paul was fit for the task by reason of what God and Christ had done for him. On the other hand, from the standpoint of human qualifications or abilities, no one was adequate to serve in this manner, especially in view of the consequences to which acceptance or rejection of the message led.

Contrasting himself (if not also including his associates) with those who were not functioning as a “fragrance of Christ,” Paul continued, “For we are not like the many [the rest, according to many other manuscripts] [who are] hucksters of the word of God, but as out of sincerity, but as from God, we speak before God in Christ.” The apostle was not like a dishonest peddler or huckster, seeking gain by adulterating God’s word or message. In sincerity or with a pure motive, he made known the truth about God and Christ. Paul spoke as a person sent from God and with an awareness of being in his presence. As a member of Christ’s body, he spoke “in Christ” or as a person at one with him. (2:17)

Notes:

A literal reading of the Greek text of 2:3 would be, “And I wrote this very thing, so that (when I come) I should not have sadness from those over whom I should be rejoicing. I have confidence regarding all of you that my joy is [that] of all of you.” Modern translations have variously rendered the verse in ways that are more explicit than the Greek text. “This is precisely the point I made in my letter: I did not want, I said, to come and be made miserable by the very people who ought to have made me happy; and I had sufficient confidence in you all to know that for me to be happy is for all of you to be happy.” (REB) “I wrote you a letter for this reason: that when I came to you I would not be made sad by the people who should make me happy. I felt sure of all of you, that you would share my joy.” (NCV) “The real purpose of my previous letter was in fact to save myself from being saddened by those whom I might reasonably expect to bring me joy.” (J. B. Phillips)

The explanation that 2 Corinthians 2:5 relates to the incestuous man dates to ancient times. Based on his belief that the man could not have been forgiven, Tertullian (c. 160-c. 221), however, rejected this understanding of Paul’s words. In his discussion “On Modesty,” chapter XIII, he indicated that the apostle had delivered the incestuous fornicator to Satan, “not with a view to emendation, but with a view to perdition.” Regarding the words, “for the *destruction* of the flesh,” he interpreted this to mean the “actual substance through which [the man] had fallen out” of the faith. Concluding that there was no hope for the incestuous man, Tertullian explained the saving of the spirit to mean the saving

of the congregation, for it “must be presented ‘saved,’ that is, untainted by the contagion of impurities in the day of the Lord, by the ejection of the incestuous fornicator.” Whereas the incestuous man had committed grave sin, there is nothing in Paul’s language to suggest that he had gone beyond the point of repentance. According to 1 John 1:7-2:2, genuine repentance leads to forgiveness, and so Tertullian’s view does not rest on a sound basis.

In 2:7, numerous manuscripts include the word *mállon*, meaning “rather.” This would mean that, rather than continuing to censure the repentant man, the Corinthians were to forgive and comfort him.

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

3:1-6a. The glory of the ministry – its accreditation

Verse 1. It is not accredited by self-commendation

Paul’s mentioning his sincerity or the purity of his motives may have caused some of the Corinthians to reason that he was recommending himself. He countered this implied conclusion with questions. “Are we starting again to recommend ourselves? Or do we like some need letters of recommendation to you or from you?” The Corinthians knew how Paul had conducted himself in their midst, and so there was really no reason for him to recommend himself. As he had labored among them and elsewhere, he needed no letters of introduction, as did believers who were not known in cities to which they intended to travel. (3:1; compare Acts 18:26, 27.)

Verses 2-3. It is accredited by Paul’s witness and work.

The Corinthians themselves were the fruit of his labours in declaring the glad tidings about Christ. Paul could point to them as his letter of recommendation, identifying him as Christ’s servant. According to numerous manuscripts, the apostle referred to this letter has having been “written in our hearts.” This suggests that he included his fellow workers as having deep love for the Corinthians. They were believers who had a place in their “hearts” or inmost affections. The message the apostle and his close associates proclaimed had resulted in great changes for the better in the lives of the Corinthians. The remarkable transformation would not have escaped the notice of the people among whom they lived. So, as Paul added, the Corinthians were a letter “known and read by all men.” (3:2)

The apostle, however, did not claim the Corinthians believers as his own. They belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ who had sacrificed his life for them and to the

Father who had sent his Son. Appropriately, therefore, Paul referred to them as being manifest as a “letter of Christ.” Their lives revealed what the Son of God had done for them. Pointing to his role (and possibly also that of his fellow workers [if the first person plural is not to be understood in the editorial sense]) respecting this “letter of Christ,” Paul continued, “served [*diakonéo*] by us.” He functioned as one who had ministered to them with deep concern and affection. (3:3) In their renderings of the Greek word *diakonéo*, translators often have been more specific (“entrusted to our care” [NJB]; “administered by us” [NAB]; “prepared by us” [NRSV]; “given to us to deliver” [REB]; “sent through us” [NCV]; “which we ourselves have written” [J. B. Phillips]; “the result of our ministry” [NIV]).

The community of believers in Corinth was not a letter written with ink. It was a letter written with the “spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of fleshly hearts.” Upon accepting Jesus as God’s unique Son and their Lord in response to Paul’s ministering among them, the Corinthians received God’s spirit. The working of the spirit within them transformed their lives. Unlike the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites, which were written on stone tablets, the “writing” of, or the transforming impression by, the spirit of the living God proved to be on “tablets of fleshly hearts.” Whereas stone is hard, flesh is not. So the hearts or the inmost selves of the Corinthians were responsive to the “writing” or the activity of the spirit. (3:3; compare Exodus 34:1; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27.)

Verses 4-6. It is accredited by God

When it came to discharging his commission as an apostle, Paul had confidence “toward God.” This could mean that the apostle felt confident before God in carrying out his ministry. It was “through Christ” and so by reason of what Christ had done for him that the apostle had this assurance. (3:4)

Paul recognized that his being fit, equipped, suited, or qualified to carry out his commission could not be attributed to his personal ability. He gave all the credit to God, saying, “But our fitness [comes] from God, who also made us fit servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit makes alive.” (3:5, 6)

On the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, a new covenant came into being. This covenant replaced the Mosaic law covenant and made it possible for those who responded in faith to the message about Christ to be forgiven of their sins. As a minister of the new covenant, Paul made known how individuals could become its beneficiaries. (3:6)

“The letter” relates to the written law given to the Israelites. In the case of the new covenant, there is no written legal code, with prescribed penalties for violation of specific commands. From this standpoint, the new covenant is not of “the letter.” (3:6)

Through the prophet Jeremiah (31:33), God revealed that, in the case of the new covenant, the law would be written on hearts. So the new covenant is “of spirit.” The operation of God’s spirit within believers enables them to conduct themselves according to his ways. The result to them as beneficiaries of the new covenant differed markedly from those who were subject to the law given to the Israelites. The “letter” or the written law “kills,” for it condemns those who fail to live up to it, but the “spirit makes alive.” This is because the spirit brings about a newness of life in the case of those who are forgiven of their sins and enables them to maintain an approved standing before God. Those who are led by the spirit are not under condemnation. They are justified children of God who are destined to enjoy life in the sinless state. (3:6)

3: 6b-11. The glory of the ministry – its message of grace

Verses 6b-11. Its message was spiritual and life-giving

Paul referred to the law covenant as the “service of death,” for the Israelites were unable to live up to written code and, therefore, came under condemnation, with death in view. The Ten Commandments, which formed part of the law, were engraved on stone tablets. For this reason, the apostle referred to the “service of death” as consisting of “letters incised [on] stones.” (3:7)

This “service of death” came to the Israelites “in glory.” When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were incised, his face emitted rays. (Exodus 34:29, 30) So the Israelites could not “gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face.” That glory, though, did not last. (3:7)

In view of the glory associated with the “service of death,” should not the “service of the spirit” come in much more glory? And it did. The new covenant provided freedom from condemnation and was far superior to the law covenant. Guided by God’s spirit, the beneficiaries were destined for life. Rightly, the apostle spoke of the new covenant arrangement as the “service of the spirit.” (3:8)

Referring to the law covenant as “the service of condemnation,” Paul continued, “For if the service of condemnation [was in] glory, much more does the service of righteousness abound in glory.” The law covenant unmistakably identified the

Israelites as sinners and so under condemnation, but the new covenant made forgiveness of sins possible. On the basis of faith in Christ and the benefits of his sacrificial death for them, believers are justified. God regards them as righteous and accepts them as his approved children. With reference to results, “the service of righteousness” is far more glorious than “the service of condemnation.” The splendour of “the service of righteousness” does indeed abound. (3:9)

The law covenant arrangement (“the service of death” and “the service of condemnation”) formerly had been glorified or had come in glory. This glory was eclipsed by the surpassing glory of the new covenant arrangement (“the service of the spirit” and “the service of righteousness”). (3:10)

Through the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-33), God had revealed that there would be a new covenant, indicating that the law covenant would not be permanent. Since the law covenant, which was made obsolete, came “through glory,” much more would the new covenant, which remains, be “in glory.” In the results the new covenant effects, its glory or splendour is enduring. (3:11)

3:12-18. The glory of the ministry - its transformation power

Verses 12-17. It is to exercise great boldness

The sure hope which Paul mentioned relates to the enduring nature of the new covenant and its associated glory or splendour. This meant that all the benefits of the new covenant were permanent. On the basis of the hope linked to the new covenant, Paul added, “We act [with] much assurance.” He carried out his ministry boldly or courageously, not holding back in any respect from declaring the vital message that would mean life for those who responded in faith. (3:12)

The apostle’s course contrasted with that of Moses when he spoke to the Israelites. Moses put a veil on his face to prevent the people from gazing “to the end [of the glory]” that would fade or vanish. According to the Exodus account (34:29-35), Moses would veil his face whenever he spoke to the people, but removed the veil in his communication with YHWH. Paul’s words suggest that, while Moses addressed the people, the rays emitted from his face would fade and then vanish. Then, as a result of communicating with YHWH at other times, Moses’ face would shine again. It appears that Paul’s mention of the passing glory was intended to illustrate that the law covenant also was not permanent. This aspect is what neither the Israelites in the time of Moses nor in the apostle’s own time understood. (3:13)

The mental faculties of the Israelites were “calloused” or impervious to perceiving the transitory nature of the law and its real purpose. To Paul’s own day, the veil remained in the case of the unbelieving Jews when they heard the reading of the words of the law covenant, “for in Christ” the law covenant is set aside. With the validation of the new covenant on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice, the law covenant had served its purpose. The law was designed to make the Israelites fully aware of their sinful state and to prepare them to accept the new covenant arrangement, with Christ as its mediator and his sacrifice as the basis for forgiveness of sins. (3:14)

Whenever the unbelieving Jews heard the law of Moses read to them, a veil continued to cover their minds (literally, “hearts”). This hindered them from understanding the law’s purpose in relation to Christ and to act in harmony with its guidance to put faith in him. (3:15)

Only when there is a turning to “the Lord,” the veil is taken away, making it possible to comprehend the significance and purpose of the law. Jesus Christ is the Lord to whom the unbelieving Jews needed to turn. (3:16) He alone is the one through whom deliverance from sin and condemnation is possible. (Acts 4:12)

Earlier, Paul had contrasted “letter” and “spirit” and indicated that the “spirit makes alive.” (3:6) Here, in verse 17, the apostle said, “Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord [is, there is] freedom.” In the life of believers, the “spirit” or the spiritual power is the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul’s words may be understood to mean that Christ is the energizing or motivating spiritual power. Where that spiritual power is active, freedom exists. Those who turn to Christ cease to be dead in trespasses and sins. They are made alive, forgiven of their transgressions, and discharged from the law and its condemnation. (3:17; compare John 8:31-36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 2:1.)

Verse 18. It is to enjoy wonderful transformation

As a servant of the new covenant, Paul did not veil his face as did Moses when speaking to the people. “And all of us [with] unveiled face reflect (*katoptrízo*) the Lord’s glory, being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord of spirit.” (3:18)

The Greek word *katoptrízo* is in the middle voice and could be understood to mean “reflect” (like a mirror) or look at (as in a mirror). Both meanings are found in modern translations. “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the

glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image.” (NRSV) “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.” (NAB) “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness.” (NIV) “So our faces are not covered. They show the bright glory of the Lord.” (CEV)

The Son of God is the flawless reflection of his Father’s glory. (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3) So, for Paul to have meant gazing upon the Lord’s glory with an unveiled face would really not have differed from what Moses did when communicating with YHWH. This would also mean that, as the unveiled face of Moses came to be glorious, so also the transformation in the case of Paul and other believers came about by gazing at the Lord. The emphasis in the context of the letter, however, has been on Paul’s role in discharging his ministry as an apostle. He hid nothing when carrying out his commission as a servant of the new covenant but reflected the glory of the Lord as his faithful imitator. Seemingly, therefore, “reflect the glory of the Lord” is the rendering that fits the context better. (3:18)

As imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul and other believers continued to be transformed into his image. Being “from glory to glory,” the transformation process did not stop. As the apostle and other servants of the new covenant conformed their lives ever closer to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were transformed from one degree of glory to another degree of glory. When saying “as from the Lord of spirit,” Paul appears to have meant that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of the spirit or the spiritual power that made the transformation possible. (3:18; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In verse 2, the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200) and numerous other manuscripts read “our hearts.” Many other manuscripts say “your hearts.”

A misinterpretation of verse 6 contributed to the distortion of the true sense of the Scriptures. Origen (c. 185-c. 254) negated the value of the contextual significance, saying, “By the ‘letter’ [Paul] means that ‘exposition of Scripture which is apparent to the senses, while by the ‘spirit’ that which is the object of the ‘understanding.’’” This view gave rise to erroneous teachings and numerous allegorical interpretations that completely obscured the correct understanding of the Scriptures. The Bible translator William Tyndale (c.1494-1536) called attention to the twisting of the apostle’s words. “Is it not great blindness to say ... that the whole Scripture is false in the literal sense, and killeth the soul? To

prove this their pestilent heresy, they abuse the text of Paul, saying, The letter killeth, because that text was become a riddle unto them, and they understood it not, when Paul, by this word ‘letter,’ understood the law given by Moses to condemn all consciences, and to rob them of all righteousness, to compel them unto the promises of mercy that are in Christ.”

Numerous translations render the expression “Lord of spirit” (verse 18) to mean that the Lord is the Spirit (*pneúma* [here in the genitive case]). The context, however, does not require that *pneúma* in the genitive case be represented as an appositive.

2 Corinthians 4: 1-18

4:1-7. The glory of the ministry – its sincerity

Verses 1-2. It renounces all sin and sham

Despite his initially having been a violent opposer of believers in Christ, Paul became the recipient of divine mercy and, as an apostle, was entrusted with the service or ministry of the new covenant. He highly valued what had been committed to him and the inestimable benefits that would result to those who responded in faith to Christ and became beneficiaries of the new covenant. Therefore, though faced with many trials and pressures, he did not give up or yield to discouragement. (4:1; 1 Timothy 1:12, 13; see the Notes section.)

In discharging his ministry, Paul renounced “the hidden things of shame.” He determined to be free from shameful actions that one would conceal from the view of others. The apostle did not “walk” or conduct himself in a crafty or sly manner nor did he falsify or distort the word of God. He resolved to recommend himself to the conscience of all people when making known the truth about God and Christ. In his personal conduct, he endeavoured to be exemplary. When sharing the “word” or message that had been divinely entrusted to him, he made sure that he did not adulterate it but conveyed it properly as God’s word. Paul spoke and acted with a full awareness of his accountability to God, and so referred to recommending himself “before God” to every human conscience. The apostle avoided everything that might needlessly have occasioned offense. (4:2)

Verses 3-7. It advertises Jesus Christ

If the evangel proved to be veiled, this could not be attributed to Paul. When referring to the good news about Christ as “our evangel,” the apostle meant the message he (and also his fellow workers) proclaimed. It was only to those who

persisted in unbelief that the evangel was veiled. These unbelievers continued to be under the condemnation resulting from sin and, therefore, were identified as the “perishing” ones. (4:3)

The perishing ones continued to be part of the world subject to the powers of darkness. Satan, “the god of this age” (characterized by alienation from the true God), blinded the minds of the unbelievers, making it impossible for them to see the brilliance of the “evangel of the glory of Christ.” The evangel has Christ as its focus, revealing his glory, magnificence or splendor as the perfect reflection of the “image of God.” As the unique Son, Jesus Christ is the exact likeness of his Father, flawlessly mirroring his love and compassion. The evangel or good news about Jesus Christ shines with a brightness comparable to lightning, but to those whom Satan has blinded this brilliance remains imperceptible. The illumination does not beam forth to them. (4:4)

In no respect did Paul obscure the light of the glad tidings about the Son of God. The apostle did not draw attention to himself nor engage in any form of self-promotion. His close associates likewise introduced no distracting or obscuring elements when declaring the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. “For we do not proclaim ourselves,” Paul said, “but Christ Jesus [as] Lord, and ourselves as your servants for the sake of Jesus [*diá* (for the sake of) followed by ‘Jesus’ in the accusative case].” The apostle faithfully ministered to the Corinthian believers. He fulfilled the role of a servant, doing so out of regard for the Son of God as his Lord. (4:5)

According to other ancient manuscripts (including P46 [c. 200]), the name Jesus is in the genitive case and so the preposition *diá* would commonly be understood to mean “through.” This would signify that, through the agency of Jesus Christ, Paul and his close associates came to fill the role of servants to the Corinthians, labouring in furthering their spiritual welfare. (4:5)

Seemingly drawing on the Genesis account (1:3-5), the apostle referred to God as saying that light should shine “out of darkness.” It appears that Paul regarded this divine declaration as indicating that all forms of darkness should give way to light. In its fallen condition, the world of mankind found itself in a state of darkness, alienated from and at enmity with God. According to the divine purpose, this darkness was to end. With the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, light entered the world, shining out of, or while surrounded by, the darkness. In Christ’s “face,” or in his person, “the knowledge of the glory of God” became visible in all its brightness. In the case of Paul and other believers, light shone brightly on their hearts, illuminating their inmost selves and making it possible for them to see the magnificence of their heavenly Father as the God of

incomprehensibly great love. Their having truly come to know the Father through the Son made it possible for them to proclaim “the knowledge of the glory of God” to others. (4:6)

This “knowledge of the glory of God” is the precious treasure that had been committed to “clay vessels.” In themselves, humans, like earthenware jars or pots that may break, are frail. Commenting on why this valuable treasure had been given to him (and probably also his close associates), Paul continued, “We have this treasure in clay vessels, that the excelling power might be of God and not of ourselves.” Thus through the weakness of the vessels, God reveals his power in being able to accomplish his purpose to spread the knowledge of his glory. (4:7)

4:8-18. The glory of the ministry – its sufferings

Verses 8 – 11. It suffers but is spiritually benefited

In his weak condition as a human, Paul found himself afflicted in every way, but not so constricted as to have no manoeuvrability. He perceived himself as being at a loss, uncertain, or in a confused mental state regarding what he should do, but he had not reached a point of despair nor had he lost all hope. (4:8)

The apostle experienced persecution (beatings, imprisonment, and stoning), but he was not abandoned. His situation was like that of a person who was thrown down or knocked down, but he was not destroyed. (4:9)

On account of the dangers he encountered, Paul spoke of always bearing in his body “the putting to death of Jesus.” The Son of God accounts the suffering of his disciples, who are members of his body, as his own. In the case of the apostle, so grave were the dangers he faced that he could speak of himself as undergoing a dying process (or as if, in own his person, the Lord Jesus Christ was being slain). The situation, though, was not without hope. Jesus Christ lived. So, just as the Son of God regards the suffering of his disciples as his own, so they become sharers in his life. In the case of believers, the life of Jesus is evident in their having the divinely imparted strength to endure distress. (4:10)

“For,” Paul said, “we who live are continually being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that also the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh.” It was on account of his furthering the interests of the Son of God that Paul found himself in distressing situations that could have led to his death. So he could rightly speak of being “delivered to death for Jesus’ sake.” Paul’s faithful endurance revealed the existence of an inner life in the “mortal flesh,” and this

inner life was the result of his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and so made his participation in Christ's life manifest. (4:11)

Verses 12-18. It has an inner secret of spiritual stature

The distress and persecution to which Paul was subjected repeatedly brought him into mortal danger. From this standpoint, death was at work in him, but life was at work in the Corinthian believers. The very ministry that led to Paul's coming into situations that could have spelled his own death brought life to the Corinthians. Their response in faith led to their being forgiven of their sins and liberated from the condemnation of death. No longer dead in trespasses and sins, they came to enjoy a newness of life as beloved children of God. (4:12)

Like the psalmist, the apostle experienced distress and quoted from Psalm 116:10 (115:1, LXX). The words of the quotation are the same as those in the Septuagint. Paul introduced the quotation by commenting on having "the same spirit of faith" as the written words of the psalmist indicated, "I believed [had faith]; therefore I spoke." Continuing with the application, the apostle added, "And we believed; therefore we also speak." The "spirit of faith" could denote the faith that has God's spirit as its source. It is more likely, however, that this relates to having the same impelling or motivating disposition or inclination to believe. When he was greatly afflicted, the psalmist maintained his faith in God and did not hold back from expressing it, realizing that humans were of no help. Likewise, because Paul had faith in God and Christ, he continued to speak, making known the glad tidings about Jesus Christ despite the distress and persecution to which he was subjected. (4:13)

Although he was fully aware that he could be put to death for advancing Christ's cause, he did not yield to fear. He, like his fellow workers, knew or had the firm assurance that God, who had raised the Lord Jesus, would also raise him "with Jesus" and present (*parístemi*) him (and also his close associates) with the Corinthians. Being members of Christ's body, believers could be spoken of as being raised with him as their head. The words "with Jesus" have also been understood to mean that God would resurrect believers just as he had resurrected Jesus, that he would raise them to life so that they would be with Jesus, or that they would be raised together with Jesus. According to numerous later manuscripts, God would do the resurrecting "through" Jesus. The Greek word *parístemi* literally means "stand beside" and can denote "place beside," "make available," "present," "offer," or "bring before." In this context, Paul seems to have meant that, at the time of the resurrection, God would have him, his fellow workers, and the Corinthians stand before himself as approved. (4:14)

When mentioning “all things” the apostle likely meant everything he and his fellow workers endured when furthering the interests of the Son of God. Their faithful service accompanied by distress and hardships benefited the Corinthians spiritually and thus proved to be for their sake. (4:15)

Paul then added the words, “that the favour, having been increased through the increasing number [of believers], may cause the thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” In this case, the “favour,” unearned kindness, or grace may be understood to refer to the divine aid Paul and his close associates received in order to be able to bear up under severe trials when carrying out their ministry. Through their ministry, which was accomplished because of their being recipients of divine favour, many more persons became believers. As the fruit of the faithful labours, the increasing number of believers proved to be an evidence of God’s unearned kindness. In view of the addition of many new believers, the divine favour may be understood as having been increased. Paul, his close associates, and those who had become believers through their ministry would be moved to give thanks to God for all that he had done for them. In this way, thanksgiving abounded or increased, to the glory or praise of the Most High. (4:15; see the Notes section.)

The distress and persecution Paul experienced affected the “outer man” or his physical organism (which wasted away or proved to be in a state of deterioration). Nevertheless, he did not give up in faithfully discharging his commission when faced with hardships. This was because, as he explained, the inner man was being “renewed from day to day.” The inner man, the real self of Paul as a servant of God and Christ, continued to be renewed, with God’s spirit continuing to energize or to strengthen him. (4:16)

Viewed from the standpoint of eternity and the future blessings to be enjoyed in the ages to come, the apostle regarded the distress that he was then undergoing as brief and light. When faithfully endured, the affliction “works out” or leads to a “glory” that makes the existing distress seem light. This glory is not brief or passing but lasts forever. The greatness of that eternal glory is evident from its being described as having “weight,” whereas the distress is called “light.” For the believer (like Paul), the eternal glory includes having a permanent relationship with God and Christ as an approved “son” or child of God and all the privileges and blessings associated with that relationship. (4:17)

The “things seen” refer to the afflictions or distressing troubles, and the “things unseen” designate the future blessings to be enjoyed in the sinless state. Paul set the example in keeping his eyes focused on the unseen realities to come and not the visible hardships he had to endure. He recognized that the things seen would

not continue. They were momentary or transitory, but the things unseen, which were yet to come, would prove to be eternal. (4:18)

Notes:

The first person plural verbs in this chapter (as in previous chapters) always apply to Paul. It is not possible, however, to determine in each case whether the plural is to be understood in an editorial sense or whether the apostle meant to include either his close associates or the larger community of believers.

The meaning of the Greek text of verse 15 is not readily apparent, and this has given rise to a variety of renderings. “Indeed, all this is for your sake, so that, as the abounding grace of God is shared by more and more, the greater may be the chorus of thanksgiving that rises to the glory of God.” (REB) “We wish you could see how all this is working out for your benefit, and how the more grace God gives, the more thanksgiving will redound to his glory.” (J. B. Phillips) “You see, everything is for your benefit, so that as grace spreads, so, to the glory of God, thanksgiving may also overflow among more and more people.” (NJB) “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” (NIV) “All of these things are for your benefit. And as God’s grace brings more and more people to Christ, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.” (NLT) “All these things are for you. And so the grace of God that is being given to more and more people will bring increasing thanks to God for his glory.” (NCV) “For everything is for your sakes, in order that grace, being more richly bestowed because of the thanksgivings of the increased number, may more and more promote the glory of God.” (Weymouth)

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

5:1-13. The glory of the ministry – its fearlessness in the face of death

Verses 1-8. Its conviction of the resurrection of the body

The surety of the resurrection hope enabled Paul to maintain his focus on the unseen future realities. “For we know,” he said with unwavering assurance, “that if our earthly home, [this] tent, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a home in the heavens, [an] eternal [one] not made with hands.” The apostle regarded the physical body as a tent or temporary dwelling for the real self or the inner person. Whereas the body may be destroyed or undergo the natural process of decay after death, this has no bearing on the future life of the individual. All who have faith in God and his word of promise know for a certainty that they will have a new dwelling from him. The resurrection body

will not be subject to death and decay, for it is not a body belonging to the human sphere and so is spoken of as not being made with hands. This body is eternal and suited for life in the heavenly realm. (5:1)

While in the earthly tent and subject to afflictions and hardships, believers groan. Like Paul, their yearning is to be clothed with the home from heaven. This is the permanent dwelling that will be enjoyed eternally in a state of freedom from sin and its baneful consequences. (5:2)

One's existence and activity as a person are dependent on having a body. Paul represented the body as the clothing of the real self. Therefore, once the true selves of believers are clothed with the resurrection body, they would not be "found naked." (5:3; see the Notes section.)

The apostle repeated the thought about "groaning" in the earthly tent and spoke of being "weighed down," suggestive of being burdened with trials and distress. He wanted to put off the tent that bore the pain resulting from sin. This did not mean that he wanted to die and be found "unclothed" or without a body, but he yearned for the time when the temporary tent, the mortal body, would be "swallowed up by life," replaced by the new life in the eternal resurrection body, liberated from the burdensome consequences of human sinfulness. (5:4)

God is the one responsible for the sure expectation that the mortal body would be replaced by an immortal one. Paul expressed this thought with the words, "And he who has prepared us for this very [purpose] is God, who has given us the deposit [*arrabón*], the spirit." God's spirit works powerfully in the lives of believers, and their having received the spirit serves as a guarantee that they will receive an incorruptible body. Possession of the spirit is comparable to having a deposit or down payment, assuring that the full payment is to be received. (5:5)

Endowed with God's spirit as the deposit for what would be granted to him in the future, Paul, despite the difficulties and pressures he faced, was always confident or mustered up courage. He was confident even though he knew that, while at home in the physical body, he was absent from the Lord. The implication is that the apostle did not doubt that he would be with the Son of God after his life on earth ended. (5:6)

Paul and fellow believers did not walk by sight, for they were not personally with the Lord Jesus Christ. Their walk or their course of life was one of faith, focused on being united with him in the future. (5:7) Paul's confidence about personally being with Jesus Christ was so firm that he could speak of being

pleased about coming to be absent from the physical body in order to be at home with his Lord. (5:8)

Verses 9-13. Results of the conviction of bodily resurrection

In keeping with his sure hope, the apostle determined to be acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether at home in the physical body or whether away from it. At the time of Jesus' return as king and judge, believers would be either alive on earth or out of their earthly bodies (because of having died). So it appears that Paul meant that his desire was to be found in an approved condition at the time of Christ's return (whether that be while he was still in his earthly "tent" or whether that be after his earthly life had ended). (5:9)

For believers, Christ's return will result in a time of judgment or accounting. Paul continued, "For all of us must appear before Christ's judgment seat, that each [of us] may be repaid for the things done in the body, whether good or vile." The nature of this judgment is not primarily for the purpose of determining punishment. It will be an assessment of individual conduct or whether the deeds done in the body merit censure or approval. Although believers come to be in possession of the real or eternal life in its ultimate sense, the Lord Jesus Christ will have them render an account regarding how they have used the gifts entrusted to them, the manner in which they have treated others, and their motivations, words, and deeds. (5:10)

While on earth, Jesus revealed that, at the time of judgment, persons who proved to be faithful and industrious would be rewarded, and individuals who were indolent and did not use their potential to the full in advancing his cause would lose rewards. (Luke 12:35-48; 19:15-19) Details concerning this judgment are not provided. Nevertheless, the certainty of the future judgment should give believers reason for serious thought about the way in which they are living their lives. They need to have a wholesome fear of the Lord Jesus Christ, being serious about wanting his approval at the time of judgment.

In discharging his commission as an apostle, Paul did so with a full awareness of his accountability to the Son of God. For this reason, he could speak of "knowing the fear of the Lord." On account of his reverential fear, Paul sought to "persuade men," conducting himself in a manner that would appeal to the consciences of those with whom he shared the good news about Jesus Christ. He diligently avoided whatever could have given rise to needless offense, maintaining exemplary conduct and not insisting on his own rights. His fellow workers likewise demonstrated a wholesome fear of the Lord Jesus Christ, and

the apostle's use of the first person plural verbs may have been intended to include them. (5:11)

To God, nothing about Paul's thoughts, words, or deeds nor those of his close associates were hidden. So the apostle could say, "We have been made known to God." He then added, "I hope that also to your consciences we have been made known." In view of the individuals who had questioned his motives and made attacks against him, Paul did not speak with the same confidence about the Corinthian believers as he did about God. In their case, he expressed the hope (not the complete assurance) that their individual consciences would have responded favourably to the way in which he had conducted himself while with them. (5:11)

Paul did not again attempt to recommend himself (as some might have wrongly concluded). His aim was to give the Corinthians occasion or grounds for "boasting," or taking pride in him, and thus being able to respond to persons who boasted on the basis of outward appearances (literally, the "face") and not the "heart." The "face" or outward appearance could have included eloquence and an impressive personality. Persons who gloried in outward appearances (which can be deceptive) failed to see what the "heart" is. They did not recognize the real person, the identity of the individual in the inmost self and which identity is reflected in attitude or disposition, word, and action that are of a nature which commends itself to the consciences of others. (5:12)

Paul's zeal, devotion, and intensity may have caused some to conclude that he was beside himself or seemed to be out of his mind. If he appeared as one who had lost his senses, it was for God. Especially in view of the great mercy extended to him, Paul had an overwhelming sense of the unmerited kindness he had been shown, and this motivated him to exert himself vigorously to carry out his ministry. If he appeared to be of sound mind as he taught the truth about Jesus Christ, it was for the Corinthians or for their benefit. (5:13)

5:14-21 The glory of the ministry – its motives and dignity

Verses 14-17. Its glorious motive

The "love of the Christ" can refer either to the love Christ has for believers or the love believers have for him. In the context of the surrender of his life, the more likely significance would appear to be his love for believers. This love has either impelling or controlling power. The Greek word *synécho* can convey the thought of exerting pressure, which may be either to prompt action or to restrain activity. Modern translations have variously rendered Paul's words. (5:14) "For

the love of Christ urges us on.” (NRSV) “For Christ’s love compels us.” (NIV) “The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ.” (J. B. Phillips) “For the love of Christ controls us.” (REB) “We are ruled by Christ’s love for us.” (CEV) “For the love of Christ overwhelms us.” (NJB)

The Greek participle meaning “we having judged” (form of the verb *kríno*) relates to having come to a firm conviction. Paul and fellow believers had no doubt that one, Christ, had died for all, and “so all have died.” Death is the penalty for sin, and Christ took upon himself the full penalty for all sin and all sinners. In that sense, all died with him. (5:14)

For believers, the fact that Christ died for everyone has had a profound effect on their lives. Upon accepting him and his sacrificial death for them, they have ceased to be dead in trespasses. As persons granted a newness of life as approved children of God, they no longer live for themselves, conducting themselves in ways that are typical of persons without any relationship to him and his Son. Instead, they live for the one who died for them and rose from the dead, earnestly seeking to do what pleases the Son of God and serves to further his interests. (5:15)

The status of believers as persons who have ceased to be under condemnation and are in possession of a newness of life has also resulted in looking at others differently. Speaking of himself (and probably also including fellow believers), Paul continued, “So from now on we know no one according to the flesh. Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, now, however, we no longer know [him in this way].” This knowing “according to the flesh” relates to looking at others on the basis of outward appearances, using the standards of evaluation of a world in a state of alienation from God. Approved children of God do not “know,” recognize, or regard anyone on the basis of outward appearances, including eloquence, impressive personality, social status, wealth, or influence. (5:16)

The significance of knowing Christ “according to the flesh” depends on whether the first person plural Greek verbs apply to the apostle only or include the Corinthians and other believers. The biblical accounts provide no indication that Paul had seen or heard Jesus speak during the time he taught in Jerusalem. As one whom Gamaliel instructed, Paul must have heard something about Jesus, leading him to draw conclusions about him. (Acts 22:3; 26:26.) These conclusions would have been “according to the flesh.” They would have been based on faulty human reasoning. Examples of the kind of conclusions to which individuals came are preserved in the Scriptures. Some maintained that he was a “good man”; others insisted that he deceived the crowds. (John 7:12) There were

Jews who regarded him as a prophet, but others viewed him as an impostor, a transgressor of the law, a drunkard and a glutton, a man who enjoyed the company of tax collectors and sinners. (Matthew 27:63; Luke 7:16, 34; John 9:16) The very fact that Paul had been a rabid persecutor of Christ's disciples reveals that he considered the Son of God to have been a deceiver, a false Messiah. In that distorted sense, Paul "knew" Jesus "according to the flesh." (5:16)

Other believers may initially have held like negative views about Jesus, views that were based on things they had heard about him. All such former knowing of Jesus "according to the flesh" ended when they put their faith in him. (5:16)

Believers are "in Christ" or at one with him as members of his body. "If anyone [is] in Christ, [he is (or there is)] a new creation." Those who are at one with the Son of God are children of his Father, forgiven of their sins and in possession of a new life free from condemnation. In that sense, they are new persons, eliminating any basis for making judgments "according to the flesh," outward appearances, or human standards or opinions. In the case of believers, "the old things have passed away." Their old or former condition ended and, by reason of coming to be at one with Christ, "new things have come be." From a state of enmity with and alienation from God, they entered into an approved relationship with him as his children, united to him through his unique Son. (5:17)

Verses 18-21. Its wonderful dignity.

Paul gave the credit to God for the change that had taken place, saying, "But all things [are] from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation." Sin alienated all humans from God, making it necessary for sins to be forgiven in order to end the condition of alienation. God himself provided the means for reconciliation by having his Son die for sinners. As one who had become reconciled to God through Christ, Paul was entrusted with the "ministry of reconciliation." (5:18)

Commenting further on the nature of the reconciliation, Paul continued, "God, in Christ, was reconciling a world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and he committed the message of reconciliation to us." It is "in Christ" (or by coming to be at one with him through their faith in him and what his sacrificial death accomplished) that God made it possible for the world of mankind to be reconciled to him. Because his Son died for sinners, God no longer reckoned transgressions against those who accepted his arrangement for having their sins forgiven. Paul was one to whom the "word" or "message" of reconciliation was entrusted. When discharging the ministry that had been

granted him, he made known to others how, on the basis of their faith in Christ and what he had accomplished by his sacrificial death, they could become reconciled to God as part of his family of beloved children. (5:19)

Because Christ is the one through whom the reconciliation is effected, Paul, as one who made known the message about reconciliation, acted for him. The apostle's role was that of an ambassador for Christ. It was also God's will that humans accept the arrangement he had made for them to be reconciled to him. So God's appeal for humans to be reconciled to him was being made through Paul and other believers, and it was also an entreaty that was being made for Christ, the one who wanted humans to be at peace with his Father and had made reconciliation possible through his sacrificial death. (5:20)

Jesus Christ did not "know" sin from the standpoint of his being sinless and so as one who had never experienced sin as a participant. But God made him "sin for us," having him take upon himself all human sin (past, present, and future) and its penalty by dying for sinners. As a result, in Christ, "we might become righteousness of God." By coming to be at one with Christ as members of his body, believers come to be "righteousness of God," having God regard them as having the flawless uprightness of his Son, the head of the corporate body. The Son is the perfect image of his Father, and his righteousness is the same as that of his Father. (5:21)

Notes:

In verse 3, the Greek word for "clothe" or "put on" is *endyo*, and a form of this verb appears in the oldest extant manuscripts and many others. There are manuscripts that contain a form of the verb *ekdyo*, meaning "take off" or "strip off." This accounts for the different renderings in modern translations. "Because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked." (NIV) "In the hope that, being thus clothed, we shall not find ourselves naked." (REB) "If indeed, when we have taken it off, we shall not be found naked." (NAB) "If indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked." (NRSV)

Jesus Christ had assured his disciples that he would be with them to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) But this referred to his being with them in spirit. While in their earthly "tent," believers are not with him in the literal sense but (as Paul expressed it [in verse 6]) are "absent from the Lord."

In verse 17, the concluding words differ in ancient manuscripts ("look! new things have come to be"; "look! all things have become new"). The oldest

manuscripts contain the reading without the expression that is rendered “all things.”

2 Corinthians 6:1-18

6:1-10 The glory of the ministry – its character

Verses 1-3. It is to be blameless

The opening Greek word *synergéo*, meaning “working with,” does not have an object. Earlier (in 5:20), God is represented as making the entreaty through the ambassadors for Christ. So there is a basis for considering “God” to be the object, and numerous translations contain renderings that make the reference to God explicit (“God’s fellow workers [NIV]; “sharing in God’s work” [REB]; “work together with God” [CEV]; “workers together with God” [NCV]). As a participant in God’s work, Paul appealed to fellow believers not to accept God’s gracious favour or unmerited kindness “in vain.” For believers, God’s favour related to having their sins forgiven and coming to be reconciled to him. If they were to fail in living upright lives as God’s obedient children, they would be acting contrary to the purpose for which they had been shown his favour. This would mean that their initial acceptance of it would prove to be for nothing. (6:1)

With an apparent reference to God as the speaker, Paul continued, “For he says,” and then quoted from Isaiah 49:8 (LXX), “In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of deliverance I helped you.” The apostle then made an application, “Look! Now [is] the acceptable time. Look! Now [is] the day of deliverance.” It was the “acceptable,” right, or appropriate time for entreating others to become reconciled to God and for appealing to those who had responded to the appeal to live in keeping with its purpose. It proved to be a time for God to “hear” or respond favourably to those who desired reconciliation with him. From the standpoint of seizing the opportunity to have God’s favourable hearing, it was also an acceptable time for the world of mankind. It was a “day of deliverance” or salvation, for it opened up to responsive ones forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the resultant condemnation. (6:2)

In working together with God, Paul determined not to give anyone reason for legitimate offense, for he did not want his ministry to be faulted. (6:3) Using the first person plural verbs, he apparently spoke of his own course and indicated how he, “in all [circumstances],” recommended himself as a minister or servant of God.

Verses 4-10. It is to be approved

Paul endured much, repeatedly facing hardships, mistreatment, and hostility. While sharing the message about Christ with others, he experienced tribulations or afflictions and found himself in needy or distressing circumstances and in difficulties. (6:4)

He was beaten, imprisoned, and thronged by enraged mobs. Besides working hard in advancing Christ's cause, he laboured with his own hands for life's necessities. Paul often went without sleep and food. (6:5)

Despite the troubles and hardships the apostle endured, he recommended himself as God's servant by the "purity" of his life, the "knowledge" about God and Christ he imparted to others, the "patience" he displayed, bearing up without becoming bitter or resentful, and the "kindness" he manifested in his dealings with others. Paul's reference to recommending himself in "Holy Spirit" may be understood to mean that he continually allowed God's spirit to guide him in thought, word, and deed. Moreover, the spiritual gifts with which he had been endowed revealed the operation of God's spirit within him. The "love" Paul showed in carrying out his commission was "unhypocritical," a genuine reflection of his deep care and concern for others. He was willing to forego personal interests and rights in order to appeal to the conscience of those to whom he proclaimed the good news about Christ and to the conscience of believers. (6:6)

The expression "truthful word" (literally, "word of truth") may be understood to relate either to the apostle's proclaiming a truthful message or to his being truthful in his speaking. He relied on the "power of God" and not on his own strength or ability. The "weapons of righteousness" that Paul used were of a spiritual kind. He employed them for the benefit of others in battling error or anything that stood in the way of the advancement of Christ's cause. In literal warfare, the right hand would usually be used for wielding a sword or another weapon, whereas the shield would be held in the left hand. So, when referring to the "weapons of righteousness" as being on the "right and the left," Paul meant offensive and defensive spiritual implements. His primary weapon would have been the "sword of the spirit" or the "word of God," which word or message exposes error and reveals the truth about how to be reconciled to God through his Son. (6:7; Ephesians 6:17; see Ephesians 6:14-17 for a description of the spiritual armour.)

In expression of unmerited divine favour, Paul had been called to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his capacity as an apostle, Paul was in possession of

glory or honour. By faithfully discharging his sacred trust, he did so “through glory.” At the same time, when declaring the glad tidings about Jesus Christ, he was subjected to abuse and misrepresentation. Accordingly, he also recommended himself as God’s minister through the dishonour opposers or detractors heaped upon him. The “bad report” could designate the slander or insult that was directed against Paul, and the “good report” could relate to the kindly expressions of commendation made about him as a devoted apostle. There were those who maligned Paul, maintaining that he was a deceiver with ulterior motives. Others recognized him to be exemplary in trustworthiness and truthfulness. So Paul could speak of recommending himself as God’s minister both as a deceiver (one falsely accused of being such) and a truthful person. (6:8)

To the world alienated from God, Paul was unknown. In the eyes of people generally, he did not have the kind of wealth and position that distinguished famous men. Yet, among believers, he was recognized as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and a beloved brother, a fellow member of God’s family. The apostle could speak of himself as dying because he repeatedly faced dangers that could have led to his death, but he lived. Through the operation of God’s spirit, the man he was in his inmost self continued to be revived and strengthened, and time and again he was delivered from mortal perils. Likely Paul regarded the difficulties and hardships he encountered as “discipline,” serving to mold him to be conformed ever closer to the image of God’s beloved Son. (Compare Hebrews 12:4-11.) Although the discipline in the form of trials and suffering proved to be severe, the apostle had not yet endured to the point of death. (6:9)

Paul spoke of himself as “being saddened but ever rejoicing.” He was deeply grieved when fellow believers became unfaithful or failed in conducting themselves as obedient children of God and when his fellow countrymen and others did not respond to the good news about Jesus Christ. (2:4; Romans 9:2, 3; Philippians 3:18) Nevertheless, he could at all times rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, being filled with joy on account of being at one with him, having been extended extraordinary kindness and mercy, and continuing to be the recipient of divine aid and guidance. From a material standpoint, Paul was poor. He had no home of his own and laboured with his hands to care for his basic needs. From a spiritual standpoint, though, he was in a position to make many “rich,” imparting to them the vital knowledge about God and his Son that opened up the priceless treasure of coming to be members of God’s family of beloved children liberated from sin and its resultant condemnation. As children of God, believers also came to be heirs, destined to enjoy an inheritance in the heavens that was more valuable than any earthly inheritance could possibly be. Whereas the apostle had “nothing” from a material standpoint, he considered himself as

possessing “everything,” for he had the far more valuable enduring spiritual riches that made transitory material wealth appear worthless. (6:10)

6:11-7:1. The glory of the ministry – its purity

6:11-13. Purity is the basis of affection among believers

With reference to himself, Paul appears to have continued to use the first person plural pronouns and verbs. He had “opened” his mouth to the Corinthians, indicating that he had expressed himself sincerely, not concealing anything. His “heart” had been widened for them, suggesting that he had made ample room for them in his affections. They were very dear to him. (6:11)

As far as Paul was concerned, he had not limited his love for them. The Corinthians, though, had restricted their compassionate, affectionate, or caring feelings for him. (6:12)

For this reason, the apostle spoke to them as one would to children. He told them to “widen out” respecting their affection for him as a recompense for (or in return for or in response to) the unrestricted love he had for them. (6:13)

6:14-7:1. A plea for purity

Possibly their close association with unbelievers had contributed to their failure to express love fully. This may explain why Paul, with pointed questions, stressed that the Corinthians should not become yoked with unbelievers. “For what partnership [do] uprightness and lawless [have]? Or what fellowship [does] light [have] with darkness? And what [can be said about] Christ’s harmony with Belial [Satan]? Or what share [does] a believer [have] with an unbeliever? And what agreement [does] the temple of God [have] with idols?” (6:14-16) Uprightness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial or Satan, a believer and an unbeliever, and God’s temple and idols are opposites. No partnership, fellowship, harmony, share, or agreement exists between them. Accordingly, any kind of yoking to unbelievers (or a deliberate choice of intimate or close association) was rightly something the Corinthians needed to avoid in order to safeguard their standing as God’s approved children. (See the Notes section regarding Belial [verse 15].)

Commenting on the sacred status of believers, Paul continued, “For we [you, according to other manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200)] are the temple of the living God.” Idols are lifeless or dead, but the true God is living and has life-giving power. Believers are his people and, as a corporate whole, constitute his temple, for he is with them by means of his spirit. With quotations from the holy

writings, Paul established that God's people are his temple. "As God said," the apostle continued, "I will dwell among them and walk [in their midst], and I will be their God, and they will be my people." This is not an exact quotation of a specific text, but is one that incorporates thoughts expressed in Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 32:38 (39:38, LXX), and Ezekiel 37:27. God's residence is his sanctuary, and so his people, among whom he manifests his presence, are his temple. (6:16)

"Therefore," the apostle continued, "come out of their midst and separate [yourselves], says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean [thing], and I will take you in. [Isaiah 52:11] And I will be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 43:6; Jeremiah 31:9 [38:9, LXX]) Again, the quotations express thoughts found in the sacred writings but do not match the wording of specific passages. As God's people, believers need to guard against contaminating their holy or clean standing. So the Corinthians needed to keep separate from unbelievers, not making them their intimate associates and defiling themselves through joint participation in God-dishonouring practices. Believers have been "taken in" or accepted as part of God's family. They are his sons and daughters, and he is their Father. (6:17, 18; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls (including the Damascus Document and a composition about the heavenly prince Melchizedek [11Q13]), Belial is a designation for Satan, the prince of darkness.

The wording of the quotations in verses 16 through 18 reflects that of the extant Septuagint text.

2 Corinthians 7: 1-16

7: 2-16. The glory of the ministry – its reflection in Paul’s life

Verses 2-11. Paul’s loving concern for the Corinthian believers

The promises are that God would reside with those whom he recognized as his people and be their Father and that they would be his sons and daughters. These promises should have moved believers to live upright lives, purifying themselves from all “defilement of flesh and spirit.” In a manifestation of their fear or reverential regard for God, they should seek to be complete in “holiness,” or in the purity of their thoughts, words, and deeds. (7:1)

Besides all forms of sexual immorality, use of the physical organism or any of its members for injurious or debased purposes would constitute pollution of the flesh. Idolatry, hatred, jealousy, envy, maliciousness, mercilessness, and a host of other hurtful or destructive attitudes or emotions defile the spirit or the inner life of an individual. For believers to be complete in holiness, they, by yielding to the guidance of God’s spirit, need to exert themselves to shun all defiling practices and attitudes. (7:1)

Paul deeply loved the Corinthian believers, but a considerable number among them appear not to have had like affection for him. For this apparent reason, he urged them to make room for him (the pronoun “us” evidently being an editorial first person plural). The apostle reminded them that he had done nothing to justify feelings of alienation from him. He had not wronged, corrupted or seduced, or exploited anyone. (7:2)

His purpose in reminding the Corinthians of his sincerity and uprightness did not spring from a desire to condemn them or to reject them. Paul’s love and concern for them remained undiminished. As he had expressed previously (6:11, 12), the Corinthians were in his “heart.” They were very dear to him. Paul was willing to share both life and death with them. Another possible meaning is that, regardless of whether he lived or died, the Corinthians would have a secure place in his affections. (7:3)

The apostle’s positive expressions about the Corinthians appear to reflect the good effect the visit of Titus had on them. His love for them made it possible for Paul to be outspoken, holding nothing back. (See the Notes section regarding *parresía*, which term can denote “outspokenness.”) He took pride in them as believers whom he had aided to come into an approved relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and who had responded favourably to needed correction. Their commendable improvement comforted Paul, freeing him from

the anxiety he previously had when the conduct and attitude of certain ones among the Corinthian believers merited strong censure. Consequently, despite personally experiencing distress, he was filled with joy to overflowing. (7:4)

Paul's positive expressions contrasted sharply with the way he felt upon leaving Troas and arriving in Macedonia. He found no relief for his "flesh," for his whole organism proved to be in an unsettled or disturbed state. Paul felt distressed in every way, with "fights without" and "fears within." The "fights without" could either have referred to the disharmony in the Corinthian congregation or the opposition unbelievers directed against Paul. Within himself, he was apprehensive, anxious about how the Corinthians would respond to the letter he had written to them and concerning the kind of reception they would give to Titus. (7:5)

The distress Paul had experienced brought him low, and he attributed to God the comfort or consolation he received upon meeting Titus. It is likely that the apostle considered the desirable change that had occurred among the Corinthians to have resulted through the working of God's spirit. Appropriately, then, Paul acknowledged the comfort he received through the good report from Titus as having been from God, the one who consoles those who are downcast. (7:6)

Although the arrival of Titus brought welcome comfort to Paul, relieving his anxiety about the Corinthians, the consolation was not limited to the presence of Titus. Having been favourably received, Titus himself was comforted by the Corinthians, putting him in a position to tell about their "longing," their "sorrow," and their "zeal" for Paul. The Corinthians yearned to see the apostle again, were saddened on account of their failures, and manifested genuine concern for him. This development among the Corinthians moved Paul to rejoice still more. (7:7)

The letter of reproof he had written to the Corinthians saddened them, but the apostle did not regret having written it. Based on the context, his not regretting having written the letter must have been because they accepted the correction and made the needed changes. At the time Paul wrote the letter, though, he did regret it. He regretted that the troubling circumstances among the Corinthians had made it necessary for him to direct strong reproof to them. The apostle, however, appears to have been relieved that his letter saddened the Corinthians only a little while (literally, an "hour") and produced the desired results. (7:8)

It was not the saddening effect his letter had on the Corinthians that occasioned Paul's rejoicing. His reason for joy was that their sadness produced repentance or genuine regret about the wrong course they had taken. They were saddened

“according to God.” Their sorrow was of a nature that God approved. As a consequence of the good results, no injury had come to the Corinthians from Paul. (7:9)

“For the sadness according to God,” or the kind of sorrow that harmonizes with his way, prompts repentance and leads to salvation, or to deliverance from the condemnation that a wrong course merits. No regret is associated with this godly sadness. The sadness of the world, however, does not produce anything that is good. Individuals may be sad about being exposed as wrongdoers, but they are not moved to genuine repentance. They are merely sorrowful about having been caught as practisers of bad. So their sorrow produces death. In their unrepentant state, they continue to be subject to the condemnation that their lawless ways warrant. (7:10)

Paul invited the Corinthians to take a look at what had happened in their case. Their having been saddened in a divinely approved manner produced “earnestness,” an eager willingness to change, or a zeal for what is right. Paul used the Greek word *apología*, meaning “defence,” to identify another result of godly sadness. This may signify that the Corinthians wanted to vindicate themselves as no longer deserving of censure. Their sorrow also led to “indignation,” “fear,” “longing,” “zeal,” and “punishment” (*ekdíkēsis*) or the rendering of justice. (7:11)

The Corinthians would have become indignant with themselves on account of the error of their ways. Upon recognizing how wrong they had been in their attitude and conduct, they would have become fearful or apprehensive about the consequences. Their “longing” may have involved a desire to restore a good relationship with Paul, one of love and loyalty. Besides eagerly following through on the apostle’s admonition and giving no support to his detractors, the Corinthians may also have demonstrated their zeal for him through expressions of genuine care and concern. (7:11)

The Greek word *ekdíkēsis* could apply to the punishment the Corinthians imposed on the flagrant wrongdoer, thus seeing to it that justice was rendered. They had proved themselves “chaste,” or cleared themselves from blame, in everything pertaining to the matter involving the offender concerning whom Paul had written. (7:11)

Verses 12-16. He desires them to be assured of his love

It was not because of the wrongdoer nor on account of the one who had been wronged that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. His primary objective was that,

before God, their earnestness, or their earnest commitment to him as a beloved brother, would be manifest to them. This did not mean that the apostle had no concern for the injured party and that he did not care about what the wrongdoer had done. In this particular case, the entire community of believers in Corinth was involved. The attitude of the congregation had deteriorated toward Paul, to the injury of the individual members. Accordingly, the restoration of the proper relationship of love and loyalty proved to be of greater importance than the situation involving the wrongdoer. (7:12)

Paul drew great encouragement from the commendable way in which the Corinthians had responded, resulting in personal joy. He rejoiced even more on account of the joy of Titus. The manner in which the Corinthians accepted Titus “refreshed his spirit.” This could mean that the mind of Titus had been set at rest, relieving him of any anxiety he may have had about them. (7:13)

Although the Corinthians had previously disappointed him by the way they had conducted themselves and had failed to be supportive of him, Paul must have felt that they would make the essential changes in attitude and action. This appears to have been the nature of his “boast” regarding them to Titus. The Corinthians did live up to the apostle’s confidence in them, and so he was not put to shame as one whose boasting about them had been unfounded. Just as everything Paul had said to the Corinthians proved to be true, so also had his boasting to Titus regarding them. (7:14)

In view of his experience with them, Titus came to have greater and deeper affection for the Corinthians. He fondly remembered their obedience, and how they had accepted him “with fear and trembling.” They did not resist him or reject his words, but responded submissively to the way in which Titus handled the assignment the apostle had entrusted to him. In his letter, Paul had exposed the error of the Corinthians, leaving no doubt that they deserved strong censure. This doubtless prompted them to receive Titus with “fear and trembling.” They were apprehensive about how he would react to their missteps. (7:15)

Paul’s previous anxiety and disappointment regarding the Corinthians had yielded to joy. He rejoiced, because he had confidence in them “in everything.” This could mean that he had complete confidence in the Corinthians or that his confidence in them had proved to be true in every respect. (7:16)

Notes:

In verse 4, the Greek word *parresía* can mean “outspokenness,” “openness,” “frankness,” “confidence,” or “boldness.” Translators have variously

represented Paul as often boasting about the Corinthians (NRSV), as speaking “with great frankness” to them (REB), as feeling “very sure” of them (NCV), as trusting them completely (CEV), as always speaking the truth to them (CEV, footnote), or as speaking freely to them (CEV, footnote). The thought of openness or speaking freely or frankly appears to fit the context best. Moreover, the apostle next mentioned taking pride in the Corinthians, which is not significantly different from boasting about them or expressing confidence in them.

In verse 8, many manuscripts introduce the thought about the temporary saddening effect of the letter with the words, “for I see,” but a number of manuscripts do not include “for.”

The wrongdoer mentioned in verse 12 may have been the incestuous man concerning whom Paul had written in his previous letter. If this identification is correct, the father would have been the injured party. (1 Corinthians 5:1) This, though, is not explicitly expressed in 2 Corinthians. There is a possibility, as some have concluded, that the offender had sinned against Paul, possibly by defiantly disregarding his apostolic authority and slandering him.

According to the Greek text of verse 12, the concluding words are, “before God.” Modern translations vary in the placement of this phrase, with resultant different meanings. “I wrote the letter so you could see, before God, the great care you have for us.” (NCV) “My aim in writing was to help to make plain to you, in the sight of God, how truly you are devoted to us.” (REB)

2 Corinthians 8: 1-24

8:1-15. Example and exhortation in giving

Verses 1-8. Christian giving and the example of the Macedonian Christians

Our heavenly Father expressed his gracious favour when making it possible for humans to be reconciled to him by what his Son did when dying for sinners. This revealed God’s boundless love and concern for them. Understandably, therefore, Paul attributed the generosity of the believers in Macedonia to God’s unmerited favour. Their generosity was rooted in deep appreciation for the incomparable kindness their heavenly Father had shown them.

The apostle wanted the Corinthian believers, his brothers, to know about the gracious divine favour that had been granted to the congregations of believers in the neighbouring Roman province of Macedonia. He then called attention to the extraordinary generosity of the Macedonians as the evidence for their having

been given God's gracious favour. By implication, the apostle encouraged a like generous spirit among the Corinthians. (8:1)

He did not explain the nature of the very trying distress or affliction to which believers in Macedonia had been subjected. They were not well off materially and encountered intense hostility from unbelievers. Opposers may have plundered them of possessions, making their circumstances even more difficult. (1 Thessalonians 2:14; compare Hebrews 10:34.) Yet, despite their great distress and their deep poverty, their joy abounded and found expression in the overflowing richness of their generosity. (8:2)

Paul could testify that the giving of the Macedonians was not just "according to [their] ability." It went beyond their means. Of their own accord, they had been moved to want to share with needy fellow believers the little they themselves had. In their generous giving, they went beyond what might have been expected from persons with limited means. (8:3)

The Macedonians strongly entreated Paul, yes, begged him, for the "favour [of being able to participate] and the [actual] share in the service for the holy ones." They considered being able to give as a favour or kindness, earnestly desiring to provide help for their fellow believers, the destitute "holy ones" in Jerusalem. (8:4; see the Notes section.)

Concerning the Macedonians, Paul continued, "And not as we hoped." This may be understood to mean that the Macedonians did more than the apostle could possibly have expected. (8:5) Numerous translations make this significance explicit. "And their giving surpassed our expectations." (REB) "And they gave in a way we did not expect." (NCV) "And they did more than we had hoped." (CEV) "It was not something that we expected of them." (NJB)

"First," or most importantly, they gave themselves to the Lord (God, according to other manuscripts, including P46 [c. 200]). At the time of their becoming believers, they placed themselves fully at the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ, earnestly seeking to conduct themselves in harmony with his example and teaching. In view of Jesus Christ's oneness with his Father, they would also have given themselves to God, determined to do his will. Therefore, whether the original reading refers to the Lord Jesus Christ or to his Father is immaterial. The Macedonians also gave themselves to Paul, doing what they could to assist him. Their giving proved to be "through God's will," indicating that it was in response to the divine will. (8:5)

In view of the generous spirit of the Macedonians, Paul was particularly concerned that the Corinthians would not fall short in their giving. While in Corinth, Titus had already started the arrangement to provide aid for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul appealed to him to complete this gracious “favour,” or the relief effort. (8:6)

The apostle spoke commendably about the Corinthians, referring to them as “abounding in everything.” He then identified “all things” as being “faith,” “word,” “knowledge,” “all eagerness,” and “our love for you” (“your love for us,” according to other manuscripts). As believers, the Corinthians did have faith in God and Christ, and their faith deserved commendation. They were not lacking in “word,” or in the ability to express themselves, and they were in possession of the vital knowledge concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and his Father. They had already manifested an eagerness to give. (8:7; compare verses 11 and 12.)

It appears that the oldest extant manuscript (P46) and fourth-century Codex Vaticanus preserve the original reading (“our love for you”). There was room for improvement respecting the love of the Corinthians for Paul, but he himself had not restricted his love for them. (Compare 6:12, 13.) As they abounded, or were rich, in the things he had enumerated, Paul also wanted the Corinthians to excel in gracious giving. (8:7)

By what he had said to them, the apostle did not intend to command them to contribute, for he desired their giving to stem from a pure motive. Paul, “through the eagerness of others,” desired to test the genuineness of their love. This may be understood to mean that the eagerness of the Macedonians to aid poor believers in Jerusalem would be the standard by which the love of the Corinthians would be tested. (8:8)

Verses 9-15. Christian giving and the example of Christ

Paul reminded them about “the favour of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Corinthians did know that the Son of God had given his life for them, which was an unmerited favour beyond compare. As his Father’s dearly beloved Son, he shared with him in the ownership of everything in heaven and on earth. In his heavenly estate, the Son was rich. Yet he became poor, emptying himself of all the splendour he possessed and living as a man of little means on earth so as to surrender his life for sinful humans, including the Corinthians. Thus, through Christ’s poverty, the believers in Corinth had become rich. They had been forgiven of their sins and become reconciled to God as his beloved children, with a permanent inheritance in heaven. All material wealth amounts to nothing

when compared to the priceless treasure of being God's children and enjoying all the privileges and blessings associated therewith. (8:9; see the Notes section.)

Regarding the contribution for the poor believers in Jerusalem, Paul next expressed his opinion. In the previous year, the Corinthians had started to do something regarding the relief effort and had demonstrated a desire to act. (8:10) So, in view of what they had begun earlier, he admonished them to complete the arrangement based on their means, matching their actual performance with their previous eagerness to share in helping poor fellow believers in Jerusalem. (8:11)

If there is an eagerness to give, the value of that giving is determined according to what a person has, not according to what the individual does not have. Those with limited means are not in a position to give as much as are the materially prosperous. What counts is an eager desire to contribute in proportion to the available resources. (8:12)

To provide aid for needy believers in Jerusalem, Paul did not intend to relieve others and make it difficult for the Corinthians. Rather, he purposed that an equalizing be effected, with the surplus of some offsetting the lack of others. (8:13)

At that particular time, the Corinthians were in a position to give from their surplus to aid needy ones, and the surplus of the ones being helped could fill the need of the Corinthians. This would result in an equalizing, with the surplus of one making up the lack of another. (8:14)

A number of translations render the words of verse 14 to mean that those who would then be receiving aid might at a future time help the Corinthians in their time of need. "At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality." (REB) "At present your plenty should supply their need, and then at some future date their plenty may supply your need. In that way we share with each other." (J. B. Phillips) "At this time you have plenty. What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal." (NCV) "But it is only fair for you to share with them when you have so much, and they have so little. Later, when they have more than enough, and you are in need, they can share with you. Then everyone will have a fair share." (CEV) The Greek text, though, does not refer to a future sharing, and it does not seem likely that Paul would have thought in terms of a future material reciprocation from those who were then in need.

As the poor believers in Jerusalem received aid from fellow believers in numerous other cities, the Corinthians would likewise be aided if they came to be in need. Moreover, non-Jewish believers had benefited spiritually from Jewish believers. So it is more likely that Paul regarded the surplus of the poor believers in Jerusalem as being of a spiritual kind. This “surplus” would have included their prayers of thanksgiving and their supplications for believers who had come to their aid. (Compare Romans 15:27; 2 Corinthians 9:10-14.)

Regarding the equalizing, Paul quoted from Exodus 16:18, “The one [gathering] much did not have too much, and the one [gathering] little did not have too little.” This referred to the experience of the Israelites when they collected a supply of manna. They appear to have estimated the amount they would need, and some gathered more than an omer (about two dry quarts) per person, whereas others collected less than an omer for each family member. Upon returning home and measuring the amount they had gathered, everyone had just the right amount. (8:15)

8:16-9:5. Instruction in wise handling of funds

8:16-24. The Lord’s money is to be handled in a manner above reproach

The apostle thanked God for having put into the “heart” (the inmost self) of Titus “earnestness” or deep concern for the Corinthians. This “earnestness” proved to be the same loving care and concern Paul himself had. (8:16)

The apostle had asked Titus to return to Corinth. Titus had not just responded to this appeal. Earnest or sincere about wanting to go, he had left for Corinth of his own accord. (8:17)

With Titus, Paul sent another trustworthy brother. The apostle did not identify this brother by name but described him as one whose “praise” or outstanding reputation “in the evangel” was recognized throughout “all the congregations.” These congregations would have been all the communities of believers that were known to the Corinthians. The unnamed brother’s reputation “in the evangel” or the glad tidings about Jesus Christ likely related to diligence and zeal in advancing the interests of God’s Son. (8:18; see the Notes section.)

Paul had not acted on his own initiative in selecting this brother. “Not only” was the unnamed brother highly esteemed, but all the congregations who knew him had appointed him as the apostle’s travel companion in order to administer the “favour” (the relief effort for the destitute believers in Jerusalem), doing so for the “glory of the Lord” and Paul’s “eagerness” (literally, “our eagerness”; “your eagerness,” according to later manuscripts). The contribution from the

congregations consisting mainly of non-Jewish believers would have served for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would have provided tangible evidence of the love and deep concern believers had come to have for one another because of their faith in him and what he had done for them by sacrificing his life. The contribution would also have revealed Paul's eagerness in following through on his desire to keep the poor in mind and come to their aid. (8:19; compare Galatians 2:10).

Having been obtained from numerous congregations, the contribution for the needy believers must have been significant. By having recognized trustworthy brothers accompany him, Paul endeavored to make sure that no suspicion would be cast on his administering this generous gift. (8:20) Stressing that nothing from the contributed funds would be for personal use, Paul added, "For good [things] we are intending, not only before the Lord [God, according to other manuscripts], but also before men." This could mean that, in connection with all matters, Paul concerned himself about doing what is right both in the sight of God (or Jesus Christ [if the reading "Lord" designates the Son of God]) and fellow humans. (8:21)

With Titus and the unnamed brother, Paul also sent another brother whom he did not name. The apostle described the brother as one he had often (or in many ways) tested (or found to be exemplary and trustworthy in varied circumstances and situations). Paul had no doubt about this brother's earnestness or willingness to serve unselfishly. As for the brother himself, he had come to have great confidence in the Corinthians, resulting in his being even more earnest in his desire to assist with the contribution. (8:22)

Focusing on Titus, Paul identified him as his "partner" and a "fellow worker" for the Corinthians (a brother laboring with the apostle in promoting their spiritual welfare) and thereby expressed his complete trust in him. The other brothers who would be accompanying Titus (the two unnamed ones whom the apostle mentioned earlier) were "apostles" or "sent forth ones" from the congregations where they had ministered, and so were men in whom fellow believers had full confidence. These brothers were also "the glory of Christ," reflecting favourably on him as Lord in their conduct and dealings. (8:23)

Paul admonished the Corinthians to give proof of their love and the rightness of his boasting or his expressing pride or confidence in them, doing so before the other congregations. Believers in Corinth and other parts of Achaia would have shown their love for Titus and the brothers with him upon warmly welcoming them and cooperating with the arrangements for the relief effort. Their generosity in contributing would have shown their love for needy fellow

believers and revealed that the apostle's pride in them had not been misplaced. (8:24)

Notes:

In verse 4, Paul, as in verse 1, again used the first person plural pronouns and verbs. The change from the first person singular verb ("I testify"), found in verse 3, does not appear to be significant. This is a dictated letter, and consistency in the use of the first person singular and the first person plural in an editorial sense is not to be expected.

Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus omits "Christ" in verse 9.

The wording of the quotation from Exodus 16:18 (in verse 15) is not exactly the same as that in the extant Septuagint text, but the meaning is identical.

Luke has been suggested as the brother who accompanied Titus, but there really is no way to know whom the apostle meant. (8:18)

As elsewhere in much of 2 Corinthians, Paul appears to have used the first person plural pronouns and verbs editorially with reference to himself. The reading "your eagerness" (verse 19), which has limited manuscript support, would refer to the eagerness or willingness of the Corinthians to share in the relief effort for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

In verse 21, the reading "Lord" has the most manuscript support, but the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200) and a number of others contain the word "God."

One common conjecture is that Apollos is the unnamed brother mentioned in verse 22.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

9:1-5. The Corinthians are urged to meet their share

Paul did not deem it necessary to write more concerning the “service for the holy ones” (the contribution for needy believers in Jerusalem). He felt it was superfluous to do so because of knowing that the Corinthians (and also others in the Roman province of Achaia) were ready to share in the relief effort and had made preparations for it a year before he wrote this letter. The apostle had “boasted” to the Macedonians about the eagerness of believers in Achaia to make contributions for the needy ones and the preparations they had made for the relief effort. As a consequence, many believers in Macedonia had been stimulated to participate. (9:1, 2)

Paul desired to make sure that the confidence he had expressed regarding believers in Corinth and other parts of Achaia would not prove to be “empty” or unwarranted. For this reason, he sent the “brothers” (Titus and two others) to complete arrangements, assuring that the believers in Achaia would be ready with the donation as he had said they would be. (9:3)

In the event Paul came to Corinth with Macedonians, he wanted to be sure that the believers in Achaia would be ready with the contribution. If they were not, his boasting about them would be put to shame and so would they. It would have been an embarrassment both to Paul and to the believers in Achaia for the Macedonians to witness their failure to follow through on their initial eager intent. Especially would this have been the case because the believers in Achaia were better off materially than were those in Macedonia. (9:4)

To prevent any possible embarrassment, Paul called upon Titus and the two other brothers to precede him in going to Corinth, arranging for the previously promised “blessing [gift]” (the contribution for the needy believers in Jerusalem) to be ready. By having the contribution ready in advance of Paul’s arrival, the believers in Achaia would be making it available as a “blessing [gift]” (a voluntary contribution) and not as something than had been forced upon them or extorted from them. In the Greek text, the noun *pleonexía*, appears. This term means “covetousness” or an inordinate desire for more. According to the context, the term describes a gift that is grudgingly granted as if it had been extorted upon having become an object of covetousness. (9:5)

9:6-15. Principles of spiritual giving

Verse 6. The principle of harvest

Encouraging a generous spirit, Paul focused on the principle that the one who sows little would also reap little, whereas the one who sows much (literally, “blessings”) would also reap much (literally, “blessings”). (9:6)

Verse 7. The principle of free-will donation

In keeping with this principle, he admonished the believers in Achaia to give as they had individually determined in their “heart” (their inner self), not doing so out of “sorrow” (as if pained to give) nor out of a sense of pressure or compulsion to contribute. The apostle encouraged the kind of voluntary giving that brought joy to the giver when quoting words from Proverbs 22:8 (LXX), “For God loves a cheerful giver.” (9:7)

Verses 8-10. The principle of grace

Rightly motivated generous giving would not result in lack, for God can make his gracious favour abound to believers or bless them beyond their needs. Under the usual circumstances of life, they would also have enough for themselves and still be in a position to share generously in “every good work” (or in various ways to provide aid to those in need). (9:8)

With a quotation from Psalm 111:9 (LXX), Paul indicated that the generous giver would be richly blessed. “He has scattered; he has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.” In the apostle’s use of this passage, the righteousness may be understood to relate to the doing of what is right for those in need. The record of this righteousness is enduring and does not escape God’s notice. This assures that God would continue to look approvingly upon the rightly motivated giver and grant him his blessing. (9:9)

Pointing to God as the source of generous giving, the apostle referred to him as the one who “provides seed to the sower and bread for food.” Paul then made an application to the believers in Achaia respecting their giving, telling them that God would “supply and multiply [their] seed and increase the products of [their] righteousness.” In this case, their “seed” would designate the means for their sustenance. With God’s blessing, they would have enough for themselves and sufficient to be able to share with those in need. Their generous contributions to aid others would prove to be the products of their righteousness or their right action prompted by genuine love. God’s blessing had made it possible for them

to give, and so he is the one to whom Paul appropriately attributed the increase in the products of their righteousness. (9:10)

Verses 11-15. The principle of thanksgiving

On account of God's blessing, the believers in Achaia were "enriched in everything," making it possible for them to participate in generous giving (literally "all generosity"). Commenting on the result of their generosity, Paul continued, "[This], through us, works out in thanksgiving to God." The pronoun "us" may here denote the apostle and those who would be involved in getting the contributed funds to Jerusalem. The destitute believers would receive aid through Paul and those associated with him. Therefore, he could speak of the thanksgiving of the needy ones as being "through us." (9:11)

Numerous modern translations make this significance explicit. "Through our action such generosity will issue in thanksgiving to God." (REB) "Then many people will thank God when we deliver your gift." (CEV) "You will be rich enough in every way for every kind of generosity that makes people thank God for what we have done." (NJB) "Your gifts, administered through us, will mean that many will thank God." (J. B. Phillips)

The contribution for the needy ones ("the ministry of this service") would accomplish more than just filling the lack of the "holy ones" (the poor believers in Jerusalem). It would also overflow with much thanksgiving to God, for the recipients would express their gratitude in prayer. (9:12)

Paul spoke of the ministry for the needy ones as a "proof" ("through [or 'because of'] the proof of this service"). This may be understood to mean that the service for the poor revealed the givers' genuine faith in God and Christ. The tangible evidence of a living faith would provide the basis for those who were helped to glorify or praise God. (Compare James 2:14-17.) The offering of praise would be because those who had been helped recognized that their fellow believers, through their generosity, revealed "subjection to [their] confession of the evangel of Christ." Acceptance of the glad tidings about Christ called for displaying the self-sacrificing love that he had exemplified when surrendering his life. Accordingly, the giving that was an expression of love would reveal the givers to be persons who obeyed the confession they had made when putting their faith in the Son of God. The appreciative recipients of aid would also glorify God because of their fellow believers' "generosity in sharing with them and with all." These recipients would recognize that kindly assistance would not be limited to them but would be extended to all other believers who would come to be in difficult circumstances. (9:13)

Needy believers in Jerusalem would pray for their fellow believers in Achaia from whom they had received the contribution. They would “long” for them as persons having “the surpassing favour of God.” This may be understood to mean that, if they could, the recipients of aid would very much like to see those who had helped them (indicative of a close bond of affection). The loving aid would be the unmistakable evidence that the givers had been granted God’s gracious favour, which favour had prompted the generous giving. (9:14)

The “indescribable gift” of God for which Paul gave thanks doubtless means the gift of his Son, which priceless gift made possible liberation from sin and condemnation. By implication, this gift of love beyond compare should motivate believers to be loving and generous in giving. (9:15; compare John 3:16; 1 John 4:10, 11.)

Notes:

In verse 4, two forms of the word for “say” (“I say” or “we say”) are found in ancient manuscripts. There are also manuscripts that conclude with the words “of boasting.” The differences are indicated in the italicized portion of the literal rendering that follows, “If perhaps Macedonians should come with me and find you unprepared, we should be shamed, so that *I [we] may not be saying* you [would be shamed], in this *assurance [of boasting]*.”)

In verse 7, the extant Septuagint text of Proverbs 22:8 contains some of the words that Paul quoted. Part of this verse reads, “The cheerful and generous man God blesses, but the vanity of his works he will terminate.” These words are not found in the Masoretic Text.

In verse 13, the Greek text is not as explicit as would appear from the renderings of modern translations. The addition of words has at times resulted in representing Paul as expressing very different thoughts. “Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others.” (NRSV) “For with the proof which this aid affords, those who receive it will give honour to God when they see how humbly you obey him and how faithfully you confess the gospel of Christ; and they will thank him for your liberal contribution to their need and to the general good.” (REB) “Because when you have proved your quality by this help, they will give glory to God for the obedience which you show in professing the gospel of Christ, as well as for the generosity of your fellowship towards them and towards all.” (NJB) “The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honour and praise to God. You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by

sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else." (CEV)
"Moreover, your very giving proves the reality of your faith, and that means that men thank God that you practice the Gospel that you profess to believe in, as well as for the actual gifts you make to them and to others." (J. B. Phillips)

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

10. The glory of the ministry defended – commended by the Lord

Verses 1-6. The minister commended by his attitude

Starting with a solemn, "I myself, Paul," the apostle appealed to the Corinthians with "the mildness and kindness of Christ" (the gentle and kindly, forbearing, or humane spirit that the Son of God manifests). He did not issue commands but entreated them as a loving brother. It appears that he referred to himself in the language of his detractors when he spoke of himself as being humble or lowly while with the Corinthians but bold toward them when absent. (10:1; compare verse 10.)

Paul did not want to be bold toward the Corinthians, making them feel the full weight of his apostolic authority as one who administered severe discipline. So he entreated them to take the required action so that he would not need to use boldness or to assume an authoritative bearing toward those who regarded him as "walking according to the flesh," or as conducting himself and handling matters as would one who is governed by human weakness and flawed human standards. Although Paul had confidence in his being bold and considered acting daringly (not holding anything back) when dealing with his detractors, his desire was that the Corinthians would take corrective measures so that this would not be necessary. (10:2)

From the standpoint of being subject to human weaknesses and living as a human, Paul could speak of himself (and also of his fellow workers) as "walking in the flesh." The warfare that he waged against error and its proponents, however, did not prove to be of a fleshly kind. It was not characterized by the weaknesses or flaws of fallen human nature. (10:3)

The weapons used in this conflict also were not fleshly, not being flawed and weak. These implements are described as being "powerful to God." This could mean that they are powerful from God's standpoint, that their power comes from him, or that they are powerful in advancing his cause. They serve to break down "strongholds," which strongholds could denote the kind of error that has become strongly entrenched. (10:4)

In waging spiritual warfare, Paul demolished the “reasonings,” views, or opinions that conflicted with God’s ways, exposing them as worthless and injurious. All that is “high” and raised up “against the knowledge of God” could apply to everything that defiant humans and the powers of darkness have exalted as a bulwark against what God has revealed to be his will and purpose. In other letters, Paul mentioned the “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1) and the conflict believers have with the powers of darkness. (Ephesians 6:12) Communities of believers were not immune to the introduction of corrupting influences and ideas, requiring defensive action. The apostle fought hard to triumph over all wrong thoughts, reducing them to the helpless state of captives in subjection to Christ. These thoughts would be obedient to Christ in the sense that they, like bound captives, would be deprived of all power to do harm. (10:5)

Those who were responsible for introducing pernicious error among believers could not be allowed to continue exerting their corrupt influence. The apostle told the Corinthians that he was prepared to punish every disobedience, taking action once the obedience of the community of believers proved to be complete. Paul must have been confident that the majority of the Corinthians would demonstrate themselves to be fully submissive to God’s ways, requiring that he undertake punitive action only against those who presumptuously exalted their own views above the truth God had revealed through his Son. (10:6)

Verses 7-11; The minister commended by his authority

A literal reading of the apostle’s next words is, “Look at things according to the face.” This could mean that Paul wanted the Corinthians to look at matters in the correct light or as things really were. (10:7) Translators have variously rendered the expression. “Look at what is before your eyes.” (NRSV) “Look at what confronts you.” (NAB) “You must look at the facts before you.” (NCV) “Look facts in the face.” (REB) “You judge by appearances.” (CEV) “Take a close look at yourselves.” (CEV, footnote)

The person who “trusts in himself” that he is “of Christ” or belongs to him would be one who displays an arrogant spirit that is focused on self. (Compare Luke 18:9.) A number of manuscripts refer to the individual as trusting in himself to be Christ’s “servant.” Paul admonished anyone who thus trusted in himself to think again and then added what he should consider, “As he [belongs to] Christ, so also [do] we” (meaning the apostle). No believer had any basis for assuming a proud attitude as if he were the only one who belonged to Christ. (10:7)

To some it may have appeared that Paul boasted somewhat too much about the authority the Lord Jesus Christ had granted him for the purpose of building up and not for tearing down. By acknowledging this aspect about boasting, the apostle would have implied that he was not in any way inferior to those who trusted in themselves as belonging to Christ. Paul had been divinely called to be an apostle, and his commission included strengthening those who had responded in faith to his proclamation of the message about the Son of God. In relation to the community of believers, Paul's assigned role was constructive, helping all to grow in faith and not to have their faith undermined. The authority Christ had given him was not of a destructive nature. Paul could say that he was not ashamed of his boasting, for he was no impostor or one who made exaggerated claims about himself and his accomplishments. (10:8)

Based on his apostolic authority, he expressed himself strongly in his letters, but these letters were not meant to frighten the recipients. The ultimate purpose of Paul's letters would have been to promote the spiritual well-being of believers and not to make them afraid and thereby to tear them down. (10:9)

His detractors claimed that his letters were "weighty and strong" (expressed in an impressive and forceful manner) but that his "bodily presence" proved to be "weak" and his "speech contemptible." In their estimation, Paul did not amount to anything when it came to his personal bearing, and his speaking lacked eloquence. (10:10)

The apostle warned those who evaluated him in this contemptuous manner, telling them to consider that what he proved to be in his letters while absent he would also be in deed when personally present. (10:11)

Verses 12-18. The minister commended by the Lord

While looking down on Paul, his detractors rated themselves highly. With apparent reference to some who had an exalted opinion of themselves, he (using the editorial first person plural) spoke of not daring to place himself among them or to compare himself with those who recommended themselves. These individuals measured themselves by themselves and compared themselves with themselves. Their standard for evaluation originated with themselves, and they deemed themselves to be important on the basis of their personal view. This was a faulty measure of true worth, and Paul rightly identified those who rated themselves highly on this basis as knowing nothing. (10:12)

When boasting in the manner that he did, the apostle, unlike his detractors, did not do so beyond measure, exceeding the limit of what he could rightfully claim.

Instead, he kept to the measure of “the [measuring] reed” that God had apportioned to him for “measure,” and that measure also reached as far as the Corinthians. The divinely assigned measure appears to designate the apportioned field of operation for Paul as an apostle to the nations. Within this field he laboured, and his boasting did not extend beyond the limits of that field. (10:13; see the Notes section.)

Upon coming to Corinth to declare the “evangel of Christ,” Paul had not overreached himself or exceeded his limits as would one who entered someone else’s domain. He was first in proclaiming the good news about the Son of God to the Corinthians and others in the Roman province of Achaia. (10:14)

The apostle did not boast beyond measure “in the labors of others.” He did not arrive in Achaia after the message about Christ had already been proclaimed there and communities of believers had come into existence. Unlike his detractors who came later, he did not boastfully elevate his role beyond what had already been accomplished. But Paul hoped that, as the faith of the Corinthians increased, he would be “magnified among [them] according to our [measuring] reed for abundance.” Increase in the faith of the Corinthians likely refers to the development of a stronger faith. Upon coming to have the desirable measure of faith, the community of believers in Corinth would not have needed the apostle’s special attention, making it possible for him to direct his efforts in proclaiming the message about Christ in more distant regions. (10:15)

His being “magnified” among the Corinthians could mean that they would come to regard him more highly than they had previously. His detractors had cast him in a bad light, and this appears to have affected how a significant number of the believers in Corinth came to view him. If the reference is to his being magnified among the Corinthians, their much higher regard would have been “according to our [measuring] reed for abundance.” So, although abundant in comparison with the former view of him, this higher regard would be within the proper limits. Another possibility is that the “[measuring] reed” could designate Paul’s field of operation, and that he hoped his sphere of labor would be greatly enlarged among the Corinthians. In view of the apostle’s goal to go where the good news about Christ had not as yet been proclaimed, it seems less likely that the meaning would relate to increased activity among the believers in Achaia. On the other hand, their proper view of Paul did have a bearing on their spiritual well-being, for he, as a divinely appointed apostle, had faithfully discharged his commission. (10:15)

The apostle desired to reach areas where the glad tidings about Christ had not been made known, and this would have been in regions beyond Achaia. He

would then not be boasting in the “[measuring] reed” of others or in their field of operation. Paul would not be making any claims respecting regions where things had already been prepared or where communities of believers had already come into existence through the labours of others. (10:16)

Paul’s “boasting,” however, was not an inordinate pride based on personal accomplishments. He labored faithfully as a servant of Christ and followed his direction. So the apostle’s boasting was in Christ as his Lord or as a believer who was at one with him and to whom he gave the credit for what he was able to accomplish. Drawing on words found in Jeremiah 9:24, Paul said, “But let the one boasting boast in the Lord.” The apostle did not introduce the words as being a quotation from the holy writings, and they are not the exact words found in Jeremiah 9:24, where the reference is to boasting in knowing YHWH or having a relationship with him. Therefore, it is likely that Jesus Christ is the Lord to whom Paul referred. Believers acknowledge God and Christ in everything they are able to do, and so either one could be understood as designating the Lord in whom they would rightly boast. (10:17)

It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom his Father has appointed as judge, and believers will be called upon to render an account to him. (Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1) Therefore, the manner in which individuals recommend themselves (as did Paul’s detractors) did not count. The approved person is the one whom the Lord Jesus Christ recommends or considers faithful. (10:18)

Notes:

In this chapter (as elsewhere in 2 Corinthians), the first person plural pronouns and verbs are to be understood in an editorial sense as applying to Paul.

For verse 13, the renderings of modern translations are often more explicit than the literal reading of the difficult Greek text (“But we shall not boast [with reference] to unmeasured things, but according to the measure of the [measuring] reed which God apportioned to us by measure, to come also [as far as] you”). The result has been a considerable variety in the way Paul’s words are interpreted. “We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you.” (NRSV) “But we will not boast beyond measure but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, namely, to reach even to you.” (NAB) “By contrast we do not intend to boast beyond measure, but will measure ourselves by the standard which God laid down for us, namely that of having come all the way to you.” (NJB) “We won’t brag about something we don’t have a right to brag about. We will only brag about the work that God has sent us to do, and you are part of that

work.” (CEV) “But we will not brag about things outside the work that was given us to do. We will limit our bragging to the work that God gave us, and this includes our work with you.” (NCV) “No, we shall not make any wild claims, but simply judge ourselves by that line of duty which God has marked out for us, and that line includes our work on your behalf.” (J. B. Phillips) “As for us, our boasting will not go beyond the proper limits; and our sphere is determined by the limit God laid down for us, which permitted us to come as far as Corinth.” (REB)

As in the case of verse 13, the words of verse 15 regarding Paul’s hope have been variously translated, conveying a variety of different meanings. “Our hope is rather that, as your faith grows, we may attain a position among you greater than ever before, but still within the limits of our sphere.” (REB) “But our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged.” (NRSV) “Yet our hope is that, as your faith increases, our influence among you may be greatly enlarged, within our proper limits.” (NAB) “Our hope is that your growing faith will mean the expansion of our sphere of action.” (J. B. Phillips) “We hope, as your faith increases, to grow greater and greater by this standard of ours.” (NJB) “We are trusting, when your faith has developed, to grow further in your esteem and to continue to grow according to the standard allotted to us.” (NJB, footnote) “We hope that as your faith continues to grow, you will help our work to grow much larger.” (NCV) “But I hope that as you become stronger in your faith, we will be able to reach many more of the people around you.” (CEV)

2 Corinthians 11: 1-33

11:1-15. The glory of the ministry defended by sincerity attested in service

Verses 1-6. The sincere motives of service

Paul regarded boasting about himself or his accomplishments as foolish. In their boasting, his detractors had demeaned him. For this reason, the apostle decided to do some boasting of his own and so asked the Corinthians to put up with some senselessness from him, adding that he desired that they bear with him. The Greek text could also be understood to mean that they were already putting up with the apostle. (11:1)

Both meanings are found in modern translations. “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!” (NRSV) “If only you would put up with a little foolishness from me! Please put up with me.” (NAB) “I should like

you to bear with me in a little foolishness; please bear with me.” (REB) “I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that.” (NIV). “I wish you would be patient with me even when I am a little foolish, but you are already doing that.” (NCV) “I wish you would put up with a little foolishness from me—not that you don’t do this already.” (NJB)

Corrupt individuals posed a threat to the spiritual well-being of the community of believers in Corinth and likely also to that of believers elsewhere in the Roman province of Achaia. The apostle had jealous concern for them. He had promised them to one husband, Christ. In his godly jealousy for believers, Paul wanted to be able to present them as a chaste virgin to the Son of God or in an undefiled state as persons who would be acceptable to him as members of his bride. (11:2)

Paul feared that, as the serpent had cunningly seduced Eve, believers in Achaia might have their minds corrupted, being led astray from the “sincerity and chastity” that they should be maintaining for Christ. In the case of Eve, her falling victim to the serpent, the devil’s instrument, resulted in the loss of her good relationship with God and eventually led to her death. For the Corinthians to have had their minds corrupted could have led to the loss of their approved relationship as God’s beloved children and their place as members of Christ’s bride. This would have been the greatest loss imaginable. (11:3; see the Notes section.)

The apostle had grave concern for the Corinthians, as they had shown themselves to be amenable to destructive influences. If someone proclaimed a Christ other than the one whom Paul had made known to them, they were willing to listen. They did not reject a presentation of Christ that deviated from the truth. The Corinthians had received God’s spirit, and yet they were receptive to an opposing spirit (an impelling influence that did not promote purity in thought, word, and deed through a transformation of the inner self). They had responded to the evangel or the message about the Son of God and how an approved standing with his Father resulted from faith in what he accomplished by laying down his life in sacrifice. Nevertheless, when someone came with another evangel, one that contradicted what they had accepted, they readily put up with it and the individual. (11:4)

Identifying those responsible for introducing error, Paul referred to them ironically as “super apostles,” stating that he considered himself in no way inferior to them. (11:5) If it could be said that Paul lacked polish or eloquence in his speaking, he was not deficient in knowledge. The Corinthians and others in

Achaia had all the needed evidence that he fully knew the vital message about God and Christ. (11:6)

Verses 7-11. The rewards of sincere service.

Those who disparaged Paul appear to have pointed to his not receiving support from believers in Achaia while labouring in their midst and suggested that his ministry had little worth. This apparently prompted the apostle to ask whether he had sinned when humbling himself in order to exalt the Corinthians and others. He had elevated believers, labouring as their servant without relying on any contributions from them. Without charge, he had declared the “evangel of God” (the message about Christ that had God as its ultimate source). (11:7)

Paul had “robbed” other congregations, accepting contributions from them while serving the Corinthians. He spoke of robbing these other congregations because, at the time, they were not benefiting from his labours and so were not receiving anything for their kind help. (11:8)

When he came to be in need while in Achaia, the apostle did not become a burden to any of the believers there. “Brothers” (or fellow believers) from the neighbouring province of Macedonia arrived with a contribution to assist him. So, although he proved to be in need, he did not become a burden to anyone in Corinth and determined never to become such in the future. (11:9)

Paul took rightful pride in his having laboured without receiving financial support. He solemnly declared, by the “truth of Christ in [him],” that he would not let this reason for boasting be taken from him in the regions of Achaia. The “truth of Christ” refers to the deposit of the full revelation about God’s Son. Paul, as a divinely chosen vessel, had this deposit within him. (11:10)

Regarding his not permitting anything to deprive him of his boast about serving without cost to anyone, he asked, “Why [is] this? Because I do not love you? God knows [I do].” Paul’s unselfish service in Achaia confirmed his deep love for believers in Corinth, and God was his witness. (11:11)

Verses 12-15. The counterfeits of sincere service

As to financial support, the apostle determined to handle matters as he had in the past. Thereby he put an end to the pretext of those who, in keeping with their boastful claims, wanted a pretext for being recognized as equal to the apostle. Unlike Paul, they, however, did seek personal gain. (11:12)

The apostle then strongly denounced the arrogant pretenders, calling them “false apostles,” “deceitful workers,” and persons who transformed themselves into “apostles of Christ,” falsely claiming to be men sent forth in Christ’s service. Unlike Paul, they were not divinely commissioned, and their actions proved to be spiritually harmful to those who yielded to their influence. (11:13)

That such sham apostles existed should not have astonished believers. The ultimate deceiver, Satan, disguises himself as an “angel of light.” In the case of Eve, for example, the message the adversary conveyed through the serpent represented the death-dealing lie as enlightenment and as something from which she could greatly benefit. (11:14) So there is nothing “great” or beyond expectation for Satan’s servants to disguise themselves as “servants of righteousness,” falsely representing themselves as advancing the cause of truth and right. Their end, or the adverse judgment to be expressed against them, would be in accord with what their corrupt works merit. (11:15)

11:16-33. The glory of the ministry defended by sincerity attested by suffering

Verses 16-23a. Paul answers his critics

Again Paul said, as he did previously when stating that he did not lack in knowledge (11:6), “Let no one consider me to be senseless.” But if there were those who did think so, he would permit them to accept him as a fool in order for him to do a little boasting. (11:16)

The Son of God never boasted about himself but gave his Father credit for everything he said and did. So Paul could say that his speaking was not according to the Lord’s speaking, but a speaking in senselessness, a speaking that is characteristic of self-assured boasting or bragging. (11:17)

Many others, primarily Paul’s detractors, boasted “according to the flesh,” or from the standpoint of outward appearances that impressed fellow humans. For this reason, the apostle also decided to boast. His boasting, though, served to expose the emptiness of the bragging of those who demeaned him and his faithful service. (11:18)

The apostle implied that the Corinthians would be quite willing to tolerate his resorting to senseless bragging, using irony when telling them that they were pleased to put up with fools because they themselves were wise. (11:19) It appears that the false apostles assumed the arrogant bearing of abusive masters. Yet the Corinthians submitted to their mistreatment. They put up with whoever

enslaved them, preyed on them, exploited them, elevated themselves above them, or slapped them in the face. (11:20)

Paul, on the other hand, had conducted himself as a lowly servant. Therefore, he, “according to shame,” spoke of having been weak. In relation to having been weak, this could mean that Paul represented himself as being ashamed of being too weak to act in the abusive manner of the false apostles. Another possibility is that the Corinthians should have been ashamed. Translators have variously rendered the Greek text to make it more explicit. “To my shame I say that we were too weak!” (NAB) “To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that [resorting to the abusive ways of the false apostles]!” (NRSV) “I am ashamed to say that we are too weak to behave in such a way.” (CEV) “And you call me a weakling! I admit the reproach.” (REB) “It is shameful to me to say this, but we were too ‘weak’ to do those things to you!” (NCV) “I am almost ashamed to say that I never did brave strong things like that to you.” (J. B. Phillips) “I say it to your shame; perhaps we have been too weak.” (NJB) Paul’s apparent objective was to help the Corinthians to come to their senses and to recognize their folly in having exalted those who abused them while looking down on Paul for conducting himself as a caring servant and treating them in a loving manner. (11:21)

In their bearing, words, and actions, the false apostles had been bold or daring. In response to their daring and the baneful effect it had exerted on the community of believers in Corinth, Paul determined to talk like a senseless person, like a person who is daring. As the context reveals, the apostle manifested his daring or boldness by resorting to boasting. (11:22)

The aspects on which he initially focused reveal that the false apostles were Jews who took pride in their heritage. Paul, in his “boasting,” made it clear that he was not inferior to them. “Are they Hebrews? I [am] also. Are they Israelites? I [am] also. Are they of the seed of Abraham? I [am] also.” Both on his father’s and his mother’s side, he was a Hebrew, an Israelite (having Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, as his ancestor), and a descendant of Abraham the Hebrew through his great-grandson Benjamin. (11:22; Philippians 3:4, 5)

Verses 23b-33. Paul cites his sufferings to prove his sincerity

Paul continued his boasting, “Are they servants of Christ? I speak as one deranged, I am more so.” He then backed up his words about being a servant of the Son of God to a far greater degree than any his detractors were. The proof consisted of what he had faced when making known the glad tidings about Christ. Paul’s abundant labors included everything he did to help others to learn

about the Son of God and to assist fellow believers to maintain and grow in faith. Additionally, he worked with his hands to care for his personal needs. The opposition to his labors in the cause of Christ led to his being imprisoned more often than others. With greater frequency and probably also greater severity than any other believers, he was subjected to flogging. In view of the perils he encountered, he found himself many times near death. (11:23)

The Mosaic law limited the administration of beatings to 40 strokes. (Deuteronomy 25:2, 3) To prevent possibly exceeding the upper limit and thereby violating the law, the Jews restricted the number of strokes to 39. On five different occasions, the Jews beat Paul 39 times. (11:24)

Three different times, non-Jewish authorities ordered the apostle to be beaten with rods. One instance of this occurred in Philippi. He and his companion Silas had their clothes stripped off and were then severely beaten with rods, leaving open wounds on their bodies. (11:25; Acts 16:22, 23, 33)

The one stoning to which Paul referred took place in Lystra. Jewish opposers arrived from Iconium and Pisidian Antioch and succeeded in inciting the non-Jewish populace against him. The enraged mob stoned him and dragged his body outside the city, thinking that he was dead. When the grieving believers surrounded him, he got up and entered Lystra, leaving with Barnabas on the next day. (11:25; Acts 14:19, 20)

In the course of three of his sea voyages, Paul experienced shipwreck. In the case of one of these three instances, he must have spent “a night and a day in the deep,” likely clinging to pieces of wreckage from the ship until he was rescued or able to swim to shore when the sea became calmer. (11:25)

Often Paul was on the road, travelling from one location to another to proclaim the message about Christ or to visit communities of believers to encourage and strengthen them in the faith. During his extensive travels, he had to make his way across flooded rivers. Besides the dangers rivers posed, the apostle faced dangers from robbers who preyed on passing travelers, dangers from fellow Jews (people of his own race) who were hostile to his activity, and dangers from non-Jews who rejected and opposed his proclamation about Christ. There were dangers in the cities from lawless elements of society, and dangers in the wilderness or unpopulated areas where water might be difficult to obtain, where no protection from the elements existed, or where a chance encounter with a large wild animal could be hazardous. Storms made his sea travels perilous. Particularly distressing to him must have been the dangers he encountered from

false brothers who endeavoured to undermine his efforts and may even have stirred up unbelievers against him. (11:26)

Paul worked hard and exerted himself strenuously. Often he went without sleep. He experienced hunger and thirst, fasted frequently, and endured biting cold while insufficiently clothed. (11:27)

Apart from the hardships of an external nature, he daily found himself in a state of inward concern and anxious care for all the communities of believers. These included congregations in cities where he had personally laboured and those about whom he periodically received news from fellow believers. (11:28)

After enumerating the many perils he had endured, Paul raised the questions, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I am not indignant [literally, ‘I do not burn’]?” In view of all that had befallen him, he was very much aware of his weakness or frailty. Without divine help, he could not have endured. So he could sympathize with those who were weak or painfully aware of their limitations or their helpless state. It greatly troubled Paul when a believer made himself responsible for stumbling a fellow believer or for leading him into sin. Such stumbling could have resulted from a failure to take into consideration the weak conscience of another believer, insisting on a right instead of foregoing the right out of loving regard for the scruples of the fellow believer. The weaker believer could thus have been emboldened to act in a manner that proved to be sinful for him. Any failure to show love can have an injurious effect on the spiritual welfare of others, and can be especially damaging to fragile faith. Paul’s indignation would have been directed at those who had caused the stumbling, whereas he would feel deeply for those who had callously been led into sin. (11:29)

If there was to be any boasting from him, the only kind in which Paul would engage related to his weakness. It would involve matters that revealed him to be a lowly servant of Christ who endured trials and hardships but did not do so in his own strength. (11:30) He called upon the “God and Father of the Lord Jesus” as his witness to his limiting all boasting to his personal weakness. Paul acknowledged God as the one who “knows,” and so from whom nothing is concealed. After making his prayerful expression that God be blessed or praised forever, the apostle solemnly declared, “I do not lie.” The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ was his witness to the truth of his words. (11:31)

Paul then referred to an incident early in his life after his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. The incident illustrated his personal weakness or helplessness in the face of grave danger. In their desire to

kill him, hostile unbelieving Jews appear to have gained the support of a high official (an ethnarch) who was subject to King Aretas. All egress from the walled city was blocked, with the gates being watched day and night. Under the cover of darkness, Paul's disciples (possibly those whom he had aided to become believers) had him positioned in a large basket and lowered him from a window down the outside of the city wall, making it possible for him to escape. (11:32, 33; Acts 9:23-25)

Notes:

As elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, the change from first person plural pronouns and verbs to first person singular pronouns and verbs in this chapter does not appear to be significant. Consistency is not to be expected in a dictated letter, and the first person plural pronouns and verbs function as an editorial “we” and usually have the same significance as the first person singular pronouns and verbs. At times, Paul may have meant to include his close associates, but this often cannot be established from the context.

In verse 3, the Greek words for “and chastity” are missing in numerous manuscripts.

In verse 29, the Greek term for “burn” (*pyrōo*) is commonly understood to mean “burn with indignation,” Paul’s indignation being directed against the one responsible for causing a fellow believer to sin. There is a possibility, however, that the term “burn” relates to the internal upheaval Paul felt for the one who was stumbled. So the meaning could be that, within himself, the apostle burned with pain for the stumbled individual. Another significance could be that Paul burned with a consuming longing to restore the one who had been caused to sin.

Aretas may have been a dynastic name, for a number of Nabataean (Arabian) kings bore that name. To differentiate the various rulers, the Aretas (mentioned in verse 32) is referred to as Aretas IV. He ruled from about 9 BCE to about 39 CE.

In verse 32, many manuscripts represent the ethnarch as “wanting” to seize Paul. A number of other manuscripts omit the Greek word for “wanting.”

2 Corinthians 12:1-21

12:1-10. The glory of the ministry defended by experience of God's dealing.

Verses 1-6. The experience of God's glory

Manuscript readings for the opening words of verse 1 vary. Many manuscripts, including P46 (about 200 CE), read, “Boasting is necessary.” Others say, “but boasting,” “if boasting is necessary,” or “boasting indeed.” Based on the oldest extant manuscript evidence, Paul may be understood as saying that he had been forced to boast because of the arrogant claims the false apostles had made. So, with his own boasting, he intended to expose them as having nothing to brag about when compared to him. Nevertheless, he recognized that such boasting was not beneficial, for it provided no proof of genuine apostleship and did not reflect Christ’s example. Neither the one doing the bragging nor the community of believers that heard the bragging would have gained anything of value from it. (12:1)

To establish credibility as God’s highly favoured ones, the false apostles may have boasted about the visions they had received. This may explain why the apostle went on “to visions and revelations of the Lord.” The manner in which he did so differed from that of his detractors. (12:1)

Paul earlier indicated that he would only boast about matters relating to his weakness or helplessness (11:30), but boasting about personal visions and revelations that had come from the Lord Jesus Christ would not have pertained to his weakness. Possibly for this reason, he distanced himself from the extraordinary vision he next mentioned, speaking about it in the third person singular (not the first person singular) and stressing his ignorance regarding the manner in which it occurred. The apostle spoke of knowing a “man in Christ” (a man at one with the Son of God as a member of his body) who was caught up to the “third heaven.” This had taken place fourteen years before the apostle wrote this letter to the Corinthians. Paul mentioned that he did not know whether this “man’s” being taken to the third heaven occurred while he was “in the body” or “out of the body,” adding, “God knows.” This suggests that the experience proved to be so real that Paul had no idea just how it happened. The “third heaven” likely is to be understood to denote the highest heaven, the location where God and his Son are. (12:2)

The apostle repeated the point about knowing such a man but his not knowing whether the transfer to the third heaven took place in or out of the body. Again the apostle acknowledged, “God knows.” (12:3)

The paradise Paul mentioned must be a heavenly one, for the designation “paradise” parallels the expression “third heaven” and is used in the identical context. The unutterable words that a man could not lawfully speak probably refer to a personal revelation, possibly one that served to strengthen Paul for the trials and hardships he would face when carrying out his commission as an apostle to the non-Jewish peoples. The content of what had been disclosed to Paul was unutterable in that it was not to be made known to others. Something similar is mentioned in Revelation (10:4), where the directive is given not to write down the utterances of the seven thunders. (12:4; see the Notes section regarding “third heaven” and “paradise.”)

Continuing to distance himself from the extraordinary experience and not using it as a basis for personal boasting, Paul said that he would boast about the man who was caught up to the third heaven but would not boast about himself, with the exception of his own weaknesses. It had not been on account of personal merit that Paul had been granted the special revelation that he had mentioned, and so he refused to boast regarding it in a manner that would have called attention to himself and exalted him in the eyes of others. For proof about his being a divinely commissioned apostle, he called attention to his weaknesses, which weaknesses revealed that God and Christ were granting him the strength to endure. Instead of elevating himself, he honoured God and Christ, acknowledging his helplessness and his need for divine aid. (12:5)

Paul could have boasted about matters other than his weaknesses. If he had ever wanted to do so, he would not have resorted to exaggerated or unfounded claims that would have exposed him to be without good sense. He would have spoken the truth without any embellishments. Nevertheless, the apostle chose not to boast, not wanting others to attribute more to him than what they could personally see in him and hear from him as he carried out his apostolic commission. (12:6)

Verses 7-10. The experience of God’s testing.

While acknowledging that he had received extraordinary revelations, he did not call attention to these to promote himself or to have others elevate him on that basis. (12:7)

Paul was aware that his having been granted surpassingly great revelations could have made him proud. He mentioned having been given a “thorn in the flesh” that kept any feelings of superiority in check. Paul personified this “thorn” as an “angel,” messenger, or agent of Satan, which struck or tormented him. The apostle saw in the “thorn” the restraining factor that kept him from becoming too exalted. (12:7; see the Notes section.)

Based on the context, there is no way to determine the nature of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” It could have been a physical affliction or the trouble his detractors continued to make for him. Whatever he had to bear in the flesh or his physical organism proved to be very trying. His distress was comparable to his being submitted to relentless beating. (12:7)

Paul three times appealed to the Lord Jesus Christ to be relieved of the “thorn.” Understandably, the apostle directed his entreaties to the Lord, for he endured the afflicted state while in his service. Furthermore, the revelations Jesus Christ granted the apostle made it possible for him to make his appeals in a very personal way. (12:8)

It must have been during the course of the revelations that Paul heard the Lord’s response that his gracious favour was sufficient for him. Explaining why the thorn would not be taken away, the Lord added, “For [my] power is made complete in weakness.” Through human weakness, frailty, or helplessness, Jesus Christ would reveal his power in a complete sense, for his cause would be advanced and would triumph even though the human instruments being used were in themselves weak like fragile earthen pots. (12:9)

In view of the Lord’s response, Paul found delight in submitting to his will and most gladly chose to boast in weaknesses rather than to continue asking for the “thorn” to be removed. His focus on his weaknesses would make it possible for the “power of Christ” to reside with him or, according to another rendering of the Greek text, “tent over [him].” Christ’s power would be manifested as being at work in him, enabling him to accomplish what would have been impossible on account of the limitations his weaknesses imposed. (12:9)

The weaknesses included all the factors that made the carrying out of his commission as an apostle difficult. For Christ and what he enabled him to do, Paul was content to bear his weaknesses. These included “insults” (malicious attacks and slander by detractors), “necessities” (hardships or times when he found himself suffering want), “persecutions” (being hounded by hostile unbelievers who violently attacked him or attempted to kill him), and “straits”

(distress and affliction of various kinds). While Paul appeared weak or helpless, he proved to be powerful on account of what Christ did for him. (12:10)

12:11-21. The glory of the ministry defended by experience of effective service

Verses 11-12. Ministry for Christ is to be effective for Christ.

By resorting to boasting, the apostle had become as a person without good sense or reason. The Corinthians had forced him to do so, for they had not come to his defence when his detractors demeaned him. They should have commended him, for in no way had he been inferior to the “super apostles” who spoke against him. Even if Paul was “nothing” (either meaning that if the Corinthians considered him as a nobody or that he was nothing apart from the gracious divine favour he had been granted), he, in relation to the detractors, was not inferior in a single respect. (12:11)

While he had been with them, the Corinthians witnessed the workings of the signs of an apostle among them. These signs were performed “in all patience” or “endurance,” indicating that the working of divine power was evident while Paul experienced and endured distress patiently. The Corinthians saw signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. Paul did not choose to provide details about these manifestations that verified his having divine backing, for the Corinthians knew what he meant. (12:12)

Verses 13-19. Effective service excels in helping others

He then raised a question that should have jolted them to their senses. “For in what [way] were you made less than the rest of the congregations, except that I did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong.” It would have been inconceivable for them to think Paul had wronged them by not being a financial burden to them. There was nothing for which they needed to forgive the apostle, for he had not treated the Corinthian congregation as being inferior to other communities of believers among whom he had laboured. (12:13)

At this point, Paul directed attention to his planned visit. “Look! This is [the] third [time] I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden.” His words are often understood to mean that he had twice before been in Corinth, the first visit being when the community of believers came into existence and the second one being the painful visit that is not mentioned in the book of Acts but is interpreted to have been referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:1. Another possibility is that this was the third time Paul had made preparations to return to Corinth, but circumstances prevented him from making the two previously planned visits.

Whereas the Corinthians knew what he meant, we today cannot be certain, and the exact significance of his words have no real relevance for us. (12:14)

As had been the case while he had been in Corinth before, the apostle determined not to be a burden to the community of believers but intended to take care of his own needs. “For,” as he explained, he did not seek what belonged to them, but he did seek the Corinthians, expending himself in efforts to further their spiritual well-being. This was in keeping with the principle that children are not the ones who make provision for their parents but that parents are the ones who make provision for their children. (12:14) Through Paul’s labors in the service of Christ, the Corinthians had become believers and, in that sense, the apostle had become their father, and they were as children to him for whom he had deep love and concern. (1 Corinthians 4:15)

In view of his great love for the Corinthians, he most gladly was willing to spend himself and to be completely spent for them (for their “souls”). Paul would not spare himself in any way in doing what he could to further their spiritual welfare. He then asked them, “If I love you more, should I be loved less?” It would have been a serious flaw for the Corinthians to love the apostle less because he loved them so much as to sacrifice himself fully for them. (12:15)

Although Paul had cared for his own needs, not burdening the Corinthians, there were those among them who maintained that he was crafty and had deceitfully trapped them. The “super apostles” must have been responsible for undermining Paul’s faithful service, creating doubt and suspicion about him. Whenever possible, they must have tried putting an evil construction on everything he did and said. They may have asserted that he cleverly refused to avail himself of financial support in order to profit from believers in another way. Possibly the “super apostles” suggested that Paul would use part of the contributed funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem for his own purposes. (12:16)

With pointed questions, the apostle reminded the Corinthians that he had not exploited them through anyone whom he had sent to them. He had urged Titus to go to Corinth and had sent another brother with him. “Did Titus,” Paul asked, “exploit you? Did we [Titus and I] not walk in the same spirit? [Did we] not [follow in] the same footsteps?” The Corinthians knew that Titus had not taken advantage of them. In “spirit,” disposition, or attitude, he did not differ from Paul. Like the apostle, he proved to be no burden to them. His conduct matched the apostle’s footsteps. (12:17, 18; see the Notes section.)

Paul's words may have prompted some to conclude that he was defending himself. Anticipating this faulty reasoning, he said, "Have you been thinking all this time that we are defending ourselves before you?" Stressing that this was not his objective, the apostle continued, "Before God in Christ we are speaking. Everything, however, beloved ones, is for your upbuilding." (12:19)

Verses 20-21. Effective service warns against sin.

For Paul, it was not a matter of personal defence or vindication. He recognized himself as speaking before God "in Christ" or as a believer in a relationship of oneness with the Son of God as a member of his body, and he looked to God as the one who judges all matters aright. All that the apostle had done and said served for the spiritual upbuilding of the Corinthians, for his words and deeds were motivated by deep love for them and an earnest desire to help them to be found divinely approved. It would have been spiritually injurious for any of them to continue entertaining a twisted view of a genuine apostle and one whose exemplary conduct revealed him to be a faithful servant of God and Christ. Misrepresenting Paul would also have meant misrepresenting God and Christ, for the apostle faithfully imitated them in word and action. (12:19)

In view of the undesirable developments that had come to Paul's attention, he feared that, upon his arrival in Corinth, he would find the believers there in a condition he did not wish and that they would find him to be as they would not desire. Instead of seeing a united community of believers that genuinely cared for one another in a spirit of love, he feared that he would find quarreling or rivalry, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, cases of defamation or slander, whisperings (instances of defaming others in secret), manifestations of swelled-headedness or conceit, and disorders or improprieties. If his apprehension proved to be warranted, the Corinthians would find Paul not as they wished, for he would be forced to undertake strong disciplinary measures. (12:20)

Paul contemplated the possibility that, upon his arrival in Corinth, God might humiliate him among the believers there and that he would have to grieve over those who had previously sinned but had not repented of their unclean practices, sexual immorality, and unbridled conduct or unrestrained debauchery. His humiliation would refer to the shame and bitter disappointment he would feel because his earnest efforts to aid the Corinthian believers had not produced the desired results. (12:21; regarding how the Greek word for "again" [*pálin*] can affect the meaning of the verse, see the Notes section.)

Notes:

Chapter 8 of the apocryphal work known as 2 Enoch or the Slavonic Enoch (possibly dating from the late first century CE), represents paradise as being in the third heaven. Another apocryphal work (frequently conjectured to have originated in the first century CE), known as the Apocalypse of Moses, does also. “The Father of all, sitting on his holy throne, stretched out his hand, and took Adam and handed him over to the archangel Michael, saying: ‘Lift him up into paradise unto the third heaven.’” (37:5) Later (in 40:2), there is another mention of “paradise in the third heaven.”

In verse 7, the concluding words about becoming too exalted are missing in a number of ancient manuscripts, but do have the support of the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and numerous other manuscripts.

In connection with “power” (verse 9), numerous ancient manuscripts do not include the pronoun “my” and so could be understood to refer to God’s power. In view of the complete oneness existing between the Son of God and his Father, the reading “power” or “my power” is immaterial to the basic meaning.

In verse 18, some have understood the “spirit” to mean God’s spirit. The reference to the “same footsteps” for Paul and Titus makes it more likely that the spirit denotes the same disposition or attitude.

The phrase “all this time” (in verse 19) is a rendering of the Greek word *pálai*, which term can mean “long ago,” “formerly,” or “already.” There are numerous other manuscripts that say *pálin* (“again”).

The word *pálin* (in verse 21), meaning “again,” can relate either to Paul’s again being in Corinth or to his again being humiliated. This difference is reflected in the renderings of modern translations. “I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness they practiced.” (NAB) “I am afraid that when I come my God may humiliate me again in your presence, that I may have cause to grieve over many who were sinning before and have not repented of their unclean lives, their fornication and sensuality.” (REB) If the reference is to again being humbled, this would lend support to the view that the apostle had previously made a visit that proved to be distressing for him.

2 Corinthians 13: 1-13 (14)

13:1-10. The glory of the ministry defended – commended by honesty

Verses 1-6. Honesty to correct faults

There is a measure of uncertainty about the meaning of Paul's words, "This [is the] third [time] I am coming to you." Many understand the reference to be to the third time the apostle would be visiting Corinth. There is a possibility, however, that it was the third time Paul had planned to visit the community of believers there, with circumstances having prevented him from going to Corinth as he had previously intended. (13:1)

The statement about the "third time" is followed by a legal principle based on Deuteronomy 19:15, "At the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter must stand." In a legal case, a charge could only be substantiated by the testimony of two or three witnesses. One witness was not enough to establish the validity of a charge. If the legal principle applies to Paul's having then intended for the third time to return to Corinth, it could mean that he thus solemnly declared that he would definitely arrive. Another possibility is that the legal principle served to warn the Corinthians that action would be taken against any who persisted in a sinful course. Believers in Corinth were familiar with Paul's manner of expressing himself and would have had no difficulty in understanding what he meant. We today cannot be certain, but the exact significance of his words does not have the relevance for us that it did for the Corinthians. (13:1)

The meaning of the apostle's next words depend on whether he had been in Corinth on two occasions. A literal reading of the Greek text is, "I have said before and say beforehand, as being present the second [time] and now absent, to those who previously sinned and to all the rest, that, whenever I should come again, I will not spare." This could mean that, when for the second time with the Corinthians, Paul had warned them that he would not be lenient in dealing with those who had not repented of their sinful course; and then, before his planned third visit, he repeated this warning. (13:2)

Numerous modern translations make this significance explicit. "I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient." (NRSV) "I warned those who sinned earlier and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not be lenient." (NAB) "To those who sinned before, and to everyone else, I repeat the warning I gave last time; on my second visit I gave it in person, and

now I give it while absent. It is that when I come this time, I will show no leniency." (REB) The "rest" ("all the others") may designate those among the Corinthians who condoned the wrongdoing, or all the others in the congregation who were not directly involved in the sinful course. (13:2)

In the event the apostle had not been in Corinth twice, the passage could be understood to mean that he expressed himself as if he were then present but was absent when he wrote. Certain manuscripts include the expression "I write," and a number of translations include "I write" and add the word "if" in their renderings. (13:2) "I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare." (NKJV)

By their wayward course of action or their wrong view of Paul, a significant number in the Corinthian congregation had challenged his authority. For this reason, he spoke of them as "seeking proof of Christ speaking in [him]." Christ is Lord, and believers are accountable to him for their attitude, words, and actions. So the proof of Christ's speaking "in" the apostle or as his representative would be through the punishment Paul would impose on unrepentant ones, and this punishment would be based on the individuals' serious failure to live up to what the Son of God required of his disciples. Paul indicated that he would be undertaking strong measures against unrepentant ones, for he reminded the Corinthians that Christ was not weak toward them but powerful among them. Accordingly, when Paul would function as Christ's instrument in administering discipline to unrepentant ones, the Corinthians would see the evidence of Christ's power. (13:3)

While on earth as a human, the Son of God could be spoken of as "weak," and it could be said that "out of" this weakness (or by reason of it) he was crucified. Christ, however, is no longer weak (having the limitations of a human), but he is alive as the possessor of humanly incomprehensible power, for he was raised to immortal life. His living is "out of God's power," for as a consequence of a powerful act of his Father he rose from the dead. By implication, Paul thus made it clear that the Corinthians could expect a demonstration of Christ's power among them if certain individuals continued to follow a wayward course. (13:4)

When referring to himself (using the editorial "we") as weak "in" (other manuscripts say, "with") Christ, Paul probably meant that, because he had not used his authority to administer severe discipline but had been patient and forbearing, he appeared to the Corinthians as a weak person "in" Christ (in a relationship of oneness with God's Son). Indicating that this was subject to change, the apostle mentioned that he would live with Christ "out of God's

power” toward the Corinthians. His “living” would be through the full use of his apostolic authority to correct and punish. God was the source of this apostolic authority, and so the power that would be exercised toward the Corinthians would be God’s power. (13:4)

Paul admonished the Corinthians to “test” whether they were “in the faith,” putting themselves to the proof. This testing called for self-examination to determine whether they were living in harmony with their faith in Christ. Instead of putting the apostle under scrutiny (as many among them had done), they needed to evaluate themselves, making sure that their words and deeds harmonized with Christ’s example and teaching. Their being “in the faith” required that they conduct themselves as Christ’s disciples. (13:5)

That the self-examination related to their relationship to Christ is evident from the apostle’s question, “Do you not know that Jesus Christ [is] in you?” Only by being at one with the Son of God, living in a manner that demonstrates faith or trust in him and the cleansing effected through his sacrificial death can individuals be in a divinely approved condition. So Paul did not leave the question without qualification but added the essential condition for being “in” or at one with Christ, “If you are not disapproved.” (13:5) The apostle hoped that, upon examining themselves, the Corinthians would come to “know” or recognize that he was not in a disapproved state. (13:6)

Verses 7-10. Honesty to demand honesty

If at all possible, Paul wanted to avoid having to take strong disciplinary action while in Corinth. For this reason, he prayed to God that the believers there would not do anything wrong. His prime objective in thus praying was not so that he would appear as approved or as one who had faithfully discharged his responsibility toward them, having aided them to come to be at one with the Son of God. His concern in their doing good or what is right was that they would reap the full benefit there from, being found divinely approved and coming to enjoy all the resultant privileges and blessings. In his great love for them, he wanted them to be approved even if that meant that he would appear disapproved or as having been a failure. This could include Paul’s seeming to be weak, as he would then not be exercising his apostolic authority to administer severe discipline. (13:7)

The use of his apostolic authority had as its purpose the advancement of the “truth,” with the focus being on the Son of God. So, in carrying out his commission as an apostle, Paul would not be doing anything against the truth

but only for the truth or in the furtherance of the interests of the Son of God. (13:8)

Paul rejoiced whenever he was “weak” and the Corinthians were powerful. He would appear weak when he did not have to act forcefully against those who persisted in a wrong course, whereas the Corinthians, after having amended their wrong ways, would have been strong or powerful for what is right. Their commendable course would give the apostle reason for rejoicing. Understandably, therefore, he prayed that they would be restored to a proper state upon taking the needed corrective action. (13:9)

While absent from the Corinthians, Paul wrote forcefully, hoping that they would make the required changes. He desired to avoid acting with severity when with them but wanted to use the authority the Lord Jesus Christ had granted him to build up or to strengthen them and not to tear them down. If he had to deal severely with them, his visit would not have proved to be as spiritually uplifting as it otherwise could have been. The strong measures Paul would have been forced to take would have brought sadness to the community of believers in Corinth. (13:10)

When concluding his letter, the apostle encouraged his brothers or fellow believers to rejoice. They had sound reason for doing so, for through their faith in Christ they had been reconciled to his Father. As beloved children of God, they benefited from his tender care. Nevertheless, the community of believers in Corinth needed to take corrective action. For this reason, Paul admonished the Corinthians to mend their ways. (13:11)

Then the apostle used a form of the Greek word *parakaléo*, which (in this context) may be understood to mean that the Corinthians should allow themselves to be admonished. In its basic sense, *parakaléo* denotes to “summon” or to “call to one’s side” and can convey the thought of “exhort,” “encourage,” “admonish,” or “comfort.” (13:11) Translators have variously rendered the Greek expression as “listen to my appeal” (NRSV, NIV), “encourage one another (NAB, NJB), “take our appeal to heart” (REB), “pay attention to what I have said” (CEV), and “consider my advice” (J. B. Phillips).

13:11-14. Benediction and farewell

Verses 11-13. The exhortation

The Corinthians needed to cease having divisions among themselves, shunning a party spirit, and to strive being of the same mind as fellow children of God. As members of the same spiritual family, they should have been united in love and

concerned about being at peace with one another, not quarreling because of looking to men as leaders. (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:10-12.) By preserving unity and peace among themselves, the “God of love and peace” would be with them. They would then continue to experience his love and care. As recipients of divine aid, they would enjoy inner peace, well-being, or security. (13:11)

As in 1 Corinthians 16:20, Paul included the encouragement, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” By greeting one another in this manner, the Corinthians would have demonstrated their relationship to one another as beloved fellow children of God. (13:12) “All the holy ones” whose greetings the apostle conveyed would have been fellow believers from the various congregations where he had ministered. (13:12[13])

Verse 14. The benediction

The apostle concluded his letter with the prayerful words, “The favour of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [be] with all of you.” As beneficiaries of the gracious favour or unearned kindness of the Son of God, the Corinthians would enjoy all the blessings that he made possible by laying down his life for them, and they would continue to have his aid and guidance. Reconciled to God on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, they would have God’s love extended to them as his children and could rest assured of his kindly concern for them. Upon putting faith in Christ, the Corinthians had received the Holy Spirit and so shared in the spirit as the activating and motivating power in their lives. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit could also have included the mutual enjoyment of the uniting bond of love that their yielding to the guidance of God’s spirit produced. (13:13[14]).

Notes:

From verses 4 through 9, the first person plural “we” and the first person plural forms of verbs are used editorially. Then, in verse 10, Paul speaks of himself in the first person singular. These changes from first person plural to first person singular are to be expected in a dictated letter that has not been edited.

In verse 13[14], certain manuscripts, including fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, omit Christ, and P46 (c. 200 CE) does not include “holy” before “spirit.” Many manuscripts conclude with “Amen.”



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2 CORINTHIANS QUESTIONNAIRE

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1-13

Now that we have completed our study of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, let us test again what we have learned. This is a twenty question fill in the blank quiz. You will find the answers at the bottom of the page.

2 CORINTHIANS TEST

- 1.) While we are at home in the body, we are _____ from the Lord.
- 2.) The _____ of the Lord is made perfect in weakness.
- 3.) _____ was transformed into an angel of light.

- 4.) Paul sent _____ to Corinth to check up on the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians.
- 5.) When you become one with Christ, you become a _____ creature.
- 6.) _____ yourselves from unbelievers.
- 7.) God loveth a cheerful _____ .
- 8.) We are able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the _____ .
- 9.) Paul urged the Corinthians to _____ the person who had spread the rumors about him in Corinth.
- 10.) Do not judge things according to their outward _____ .
- 11.) Afflictions are _____ , but they bring eternal glory.
- 12.) We walk by _____ , not by sight.
- 13.) A special favor or help from God, which is not necessarily earned or deserved because of good works, given to man for spiritual betterment is called _____ .
- 14.) The important thing about being generous is your _____ to give.
- 15.) Never be _____ , so that the ministry of God is not blamed.
- 16.) The Corinthians were _____ that they were persuaded by the rumors that they heard about Paul.
- 17.) Even though we walk in the flesh, we do not _____ according to the flesh.
- 18.) Prevent evil from occurring by taking away it's _____ .
- 19.) Paul felt that one reason why the Corinthians had trouble staying on the right path, was because he was too _____ on them.
- 20.) If you take part in the sufferings, you will also take part in the _____ of Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS TEST ANSWERS

1. Absent
2. Strength
3. Satan
4. Titus
5. New
6. Separate
7. Giver
8. Spirit
9. Forgive
10. Appearance
11. Temporal
12. Faith
13. Grace
14. Willingness
15. Offensive
16. Sad
17. War (fight)
18. Opportunity
19. Lenient
20. Comfort

Prophecy

The Book of Romans in Revelation

Knowing some history about the first century Roman world is helpful in order to properly understand the book of Revelation. To begin with, Rome had been a Republic for about 500 years. During the Republic, the Senate ruled. Then, Julius Caesar led the transition from Republic to Empire. His nephew, Octavian, succeeded him as the second emperor, and changed his name to Augustus. **Luke 2:1** reads:

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the Roman world should be registered.”

Please note that the same Greek word, *Oikoumene*, used in **Luke 2:1** as the *Roman world* is also used in **Matthew 24:14** and **Mark 13:10**. The first century fulfillment of these verses is verified in the scriptures at **Romans 1:8, 10:18, 16:26**, and at **Colossians 1:5-6**, and **1:23**.

The third emperor was Tiberius Caesar. Then after him came Gaius Caesar, who was nicknamed and better known as little boots (Caligula). After Caligula came Claudius, who hoped to restore the Republic. He believed the best strategy was to have Nero succeed him. Claudius hoped that Nero would be such a terrible emperor that the Roman citizens would rebel, overthrow him, and restore the Republic. Sadly, Claudius’ plan failed to materialize.

The sixth emperor (**Rev 17:10**) Nero Caesar reigned from 54 to 68 A.D. According to the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius, Nero’s nickname was “the Beast;” and his reign was far worse than that of Domitian. For three and a half years Nero tried to eliminate the early church. He had the Apostles Paul and Peter murdered, and after boiling the Apostle John in hot oil, exiled him to the island of Patmos (**Rev 1:9**). People could not buy or sell in the marketplaces without collaborating (right hand = acting / **Rev 13:16-17** / forehead = thoughts) with the Beast, by declaring “Caesar is Lord.”

Nero declared himself god incarnate. He ordered all statues in the empire to have their heads cut off, and that a sculpture of his head should be put on in all their places. Nero also wanted an idol of himself to be set up in the Holy Place of the Jerusalem Temple. He married his sister, and when she was nine months pregnant, murdered her and their baby. Nero sometimes dressed in nothing but animal hides, and practiced cannibalism. He burnt the city of Rome, blamed the Christians, and fed them to the lions at the Coliseum. He also made living

candles out of them. Furthermore, a cryptogram of Caesar Nero's name (**Rev 13:18**) yields a numeric value of 666 in the Hebrew.

After attacking the early church for 3 ½ years, Nero then initiated the Judeo-Roman War which lasted another 3 ½ years from 67-70 A.D. Flavius Josephus records a detailed account of this ongoing tribulation (**Matt 24:21**) in his book; *The War of the Jews*. In 70 A.D., Titus and three legions sieged and destroyed the Holy City (**Matt 22:7**), making it and the Holy Land utterly desolate (**Matt 23:38 and Rev 17:16**). The casualties for the Jewish people in Judea and throughout the Roman empire were enormous.

Rome was a city which sat on seven hills (**Rev 17:7,9**) and had ten provinces (**Rev 17:7,12,16**). The eagle (**Matt 24:28**) was the symbol of the Roman war god Mars. It was also the idol of the legions, and was frequently sacrificed to before and after battle. 69 AD was the "Year of the Three Caesars;" Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. They fought it out to see who would become the seventh Caesar. Was this the beginning of the end for the civilized world? A Roman civil war and simultaneous revolts in the provinces with their ensuing deaths, diseases, and famines made it appear so. Was this the beginning of the Dark Ages? The leadership (head) of the Roman empire had received a fatal wound (**Rev 13:3**), or had it? In 70 A.D., Vespasian healed that seemingly fatal wound by providing stability and by becoming the eighth emperor (**Rev 17:11**). He established a new line of Caesars; the Flavian dynasty. As a result, Rome, in that form, survived for about another 500 years.

A basic understanding of the historical facts in the first century Roman world helps illuminate the book of Revelation. For a more in-depth study of this important time period the following books are highly recommended.

Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25-26

25: As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

26: And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

A number of pre-millennial writers are now agreeing with amillennialists that a literal interpretation of O.T prophecies concerning Israel is not justified. They claim that the N.T interprets these prophecies in a "spiritualized" sense,

applying them to the present church, and conclude that the O.T provides no proof of a future national conversion of Israel or of a future millennial kingdom.

The quotations of Hosea in Romans 9:25-26 are cited as a primary example. Most who hold to the literal interpretation of prophecy assume that Paul quotes Hosea by way of analogy only, without denying a future fulfilment for Israel; others believe that Paul quotes Hosea literally and has specifically in mind Israel's present unbelief and future conversion. The author prefers the second alternative and sees evidence for this interpretation not only in the context of Hosea, but also in the context of Romans. The background and contexts of the other O.T passages cited in Romans 9 confirm the suggested interpretation. It is concluded that the literal interpretation of OT prophecy not only agrees with Paul's normal hermeneutics but helps greatly in the exegesis of this particular passage.

Today it is recognized more than ever that one's theology as a whole is closely related to one's hermeneutics. This fact especially comes to the fore in the study of eschatology. For decades the dictum has held true that amillennialism requires an allegorical or "spiritual" interpretation of biblical prophecy (especially in the O.T), while premillennialism springs from a more literal interpretation of those prophecies.

In an interesting book on the millennium, in which four theologians debate each other, George Eldon Ladd⁹ declares himself to be a premillennialist, but on the

⁹ George Eldon Ladd (born October 13, 1967- died September 25, 2008) was a pivotal figure in the resurgence of evangelical scholarship in America during the years after the Second World War. Ladd's career as a biblical scholar can be seen as a quest to rehabilitate evangelical thought both in content and image, a task he pursued at great personal cost. Best known for his work on the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, Ladd moved from critiquing his own movement to engaging many of the important theological and exegetical issues of his day. Ladd was a strong critic of dispensationalism, the dominant theological system in conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism, challenging what he perceived to be its anti-intellectualism and uncritical approach to the Bible. In his impressive career at Fuller Theological Seminary, Ladd participated in scholarly debates on the relationship between faith and historical understanding, arguing that modern critical methodologies need not preclude orthodox Christian belief. Ladd also engaged the thought of Rudolf Bultmann, the dominant theological figure of his day. Ladd's main focus, however, was to create a work of scholarship from an evangelical perspective that the broader academic world would accept. When he was unsuccessful in this effort, he descended into depression, bitterness, and alcoholism. But Ladd played an important part in opening doors for later generations of evangelical scholars, both by validating and using critical methods in his own scholarly work, and also by entering into dialogue with theologians and theologies outside the evangelical world. It is a central theme of this book that Ladd's achievement, at least in part, can be

basis of only two N.T passages, Rev 20: 1-6, and to a lesser extent, I Cor 15:23-26. Similarly, his belief in the future national conversion of Israel is founded on a single N.T passage, Rom 11:26. To support his eschatology Ladd refuses to use the scores of O.T passages dealing with the messianic kingdom and its blessings. He believes that literal interpretation of many of these passages may be possible, but that it is not required; he claims that in several cases the NT itself interprets O.T prophecies in a non-literal or "spiritualizing" sense. Ladd concludes that the O.T cannot be used confidently to describe the future millennial kingdom, or even to prove its existence:

The fact is that the New Testament frequently interprets Old Testament prophecies in a way *not suggested by the Old Testament context*. This clearly establishes the principle that the "literal hermeneutic" does not work. The Old Testament did not clearly foresee how its own prophecies were to be fulfilled. They were fulfilled in ways quite unforeseen by the Old Testament itself and unexpected by the Jews. With regard to the first coming of Christ, *the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament.....A non-dispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament.* It confesses that it cannot be sure how the Old Testament prophecies of the end are to be fulfilled.

THE ARGUMENT SURROUNDING ROM 9:25-26

To demonstrate that the N.T handles the O.T in a non-literal fashion, Ladd cites four primary examples: Hos 11: 1 in Matt 2: 15; Isa 53:4,7-8 in Matt 8:17 and Acts 8:32-33; Hos 2:23 and 1:10 in Rom 9:25-26; and Jer 31:31-34 in Heb 8:8-12.

Of these four, Robert G.E. Ladd singles *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (ed. Robert G. Clouse; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977); the four scholars are G. E. Ladd (historic premillennialism), H. A. Hoyt (dispensational premillennialism), L. Boettner (postmillennialism), and A. A. Hoekema (amillennialism).

PAUL'S USE OF THE OT IN ROM 9:25-26

Out Rom 9:25-26 as "a most vivid illustration of this principle." In this passage Paul quotes the O.T: "Even as it says in Hosea, 'I will call them my people who

measured in the number of evangelical scholars who are today active participants in academic life across a broad range of disciplines.

were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved; and it will be in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called sons of the living God."

The O.T verses quoted by Paul, Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, predict the future restoration of Israel to God's favour and blessing after a period of estrangement a judgment caused by Israel's unbelief. Nearly all commentators recognize that Hosea has literal, national Israel in view-particularly, the ten northern tribes. Furthermore, the predicted blessings seem to fit perfectly with the future millennium. Hosea emphasizes Israel's future repentance and reinstatement as God's people, the objects of his mercy.

But in Romans 9:25-26 Paul quotes these verses in a surprising manner. Verse 24 speaks of "us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles," indicating Christians of his day. Paul then continues, "as also it says in Hosea," and quotes these verses. Many believe that here he equates the Christian church with the promised restoration of Israel, employing a "spiritualizing" interpretation of Hosea's prophecy. Such is Ladd's conclusion: Paul deliberately takes these two prophecies about the future of Israel and applies them to the church. The church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, has become the people of God. The prophecies of Hosea are fulfilled in the Christian church. If this is a "spiritualizing hermeneutic" so be it. ...It is clearly what the New Testament does to the Old Testament prophecies.

Obviously, if Ladd's exegesis is correct, those who hold to a consistent grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture must modify their position. On the other hand, the exegesis of the Romans passage itself must stand careful scrutiny, especially since issues of hermeneutics and theology are involved. This writer believes that a careful examination of both passages in their related contexts will reveal a basic underlying unity and that a consistent literal interpretation of Hosea's prophecy is the key to understanding Paul's meaning in Romans 9.

VARIOUS APPROACHES TO ROM 9:25-26

Commentators and theologians who seriously discuss this passage tend to hold one of three opinions:

(1) Paul actually changes Hosea's meaning in its O.T context to make the prophecy refer directly and exclusively to his own times,

(2) Paul only uses Hosea's prophecy as an example or analogy, applying its principle to his own times, or

(3) Paul employs Hosea's prophecy literally, with the same meaning as that evident in the OT context. Within each approach there are several variations. Each of these approaches will be summarized below.

Changing Hosea's meaning

Many look at the seeming discrepancy between Hosea and Paul, "take the bull by the horns," and declare that Paul simply changed or "transformed" Hosea's prophecy. On the critical side, commentators often accuse Paul of misusing the OT for his own ends.

For example, C. H. Dodd¹⁰ has written:

The verses which follow are extremely difficult in the Greek. ...When Paul, normally a clear thinker, becomes obscure, it usually means that he is embarrassed by the position he has taken up. It is surely so here. ...It is rather strange that Paul has not observed that this prophecy referred to Israel, rejected for its sins, but destined to be restored: strange because it would have fitted so admirably the doctrine of the restoration of Israel which he is to expound in chap. 11. But, if the particular prophecy is ill-chosen, it is certainly true that the prophets did declare the calling of the Gentiles.

¹⁰) Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973) was one of the more influential British theologians of the first half of the 20th century, particularly in the area of messianic theology (christology). To put this influence in a perspective, he can be perceived as an apologist for the compatibility of revelation with analytical history. Dodd studied at Oxford University and briefly in Germany under Adolf von Harnack at Berlin University. In 1912 he was ordained as a Congregationalist minister and served for three years. The rest of his career was as a university professor at Oxford, Manchester and Cambridge. After he retired he directed the ecumenical group which produced the ground-breaking (but ultimately unsuccessful) *New English Bible*.

Dodd, in common with some others of his time, focused on the crucifixion of Jesus as a "crisis point" in history. A Scottish theologian, P T Forsyth (1848-1921), had already proposed that history is not a steady evolution but rather progress in steps, each precipitated by a crisis. That is, events appear to progress only by steady, gradual increments but are in fact from time-to-time fractured by major changes. This was the type of change that Dodd proposed in his theology.

Likewise Ernst Kasemann sees Paul disregarding the original sense of Hosea: As is his custom Paul understands the sayings as eschatologically oriented oracles without considering their original sense. ...With great audacity he takes the promises to Israel and relates them to the Gentile-Christians. Opposed to this cavalier treatment of Pauline exegesis, many conservative writers still feel that Paul basically transforms or "deepens" Hosea's meaning to refer to the church of his day. Although, as mentioned above, G. E. Ladd takes this approach, it is C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* (MNTC; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932) 159-60. E. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. from 4th Ger. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 274.

PAUL'S USE OF THE OT IN ROM 9:25-26

Battle found most frequently among postmillennialists or amillennialists, who naturally favour a more "spiritualizing" hermeneutic. H. N. Ridderbos, for example, calls this passage "a transition in interpretation." A number of exegetical points in Romans 9 -11 lend support to this approach; the following seem to be the most important:

- 1) The Gentiles are mentioned immediately before and after Paul's quotations (vv 24, 30).
- 2) The xxxx at the beginning of v 27 could well contrast the status of Jews in v 27 with that of Gentiles in vv 25-26.
- 3) Peter paraphrases Hosea 2:23, referring it to his Christian readers (I Pet 2:10).
- 4) The "vessels of wrath" of v 22 seem to be unbelieving Jews, while the "vessels of mercy" of v 23 are identified as believing Jews and Gentiles. Such a contrast is carried out in Rom 9:30-10:4.
- 5) The structure citing blessings on the "non-people" in vv 25-26, followed by judgment against Israel in vv 27-29, is parallel to the preference for the "non-nation" in 10:19-20, followed by the judgment against Israel in 10:21. The "non-nation" in 10:19 refers to Gentiles.
- 6) Paul, by the term "jealousy" in 10:19 and 11:11,14, links his own ministry in the church to the eschatological promises made to Israel. In fact, Paul's whole line of argument from the OT in Romans 9-11 seems to presuppose its relevance for his own day.

Taken together, these arguments give a powerful impetus to many theologians, who conclude that Paul in some way changes the meaning of Hosea's prophecy from that which is apparent in its original context. Of course, the major drawback of this viewpoint is its conclusion regarding hermeneutics: while the

N.T is to be interpreted (more or less) literally, the OT is not. Many amillennialists expand this principle to all OT prophecy and thereby deny any future fulfilment of these prophecies for the nation of Israel.

An argument from analogy

Many commentators, desiring to maintain the integrity of Hosea's meaning, and yet convinced that Paul is speaking of Gentiles, see in this passage an application of Hosea's prophecy, but not its total Fulfillment. Charles Hodge expresses this view well:

H. Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 340.

On the other hand, Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 274, contrasts Rom 9:25 with *Jub* 2: 19, "Behold, I will separate unto Myself a people from among all the peoples, ...and I will sanctify them unto Myself as My people, and will bless.

The difficulty with regard to this passage is, that in Hosea it evidently has reference not to the heathen, but to the ten tribes. Whereas, Paul refers it to the Gentiles. ...This difficulty is sometimes gotten over by giving a different view of the apostle's object in the citation, and making it refer to the restoration of the Jews. But this interpretation is obviously at variance with the context. It is more satisfactory to say, that the ten tribes were in a heathenish state, relapsed into idolatry, and, therefore, what was said of them, is of course applicable to others in like circumstances, or of like character. ...This method of interpreting and applying Scripture is both common and correct. A general truth, stated in reference to a particular class of persons, is to be considered as intended to apply to all those whose character and circumstances are the same, though the form or words of the original enunciation may not be applicable to all embraced within the scope of the general sentiment.

In passage after passage Ladd insists that the New Testament is interpreting the Old when the New Testament is simply applying a principle found in the Old Testament (Hos. 11:1 with Mt. 2:15; Hos. 1:10; 2:23 with Rom. 9:24-26). Rushing to the conclusion that these references identify the church and Israel as the same body of the saved is wholly gratuitous. ...It makes such application merely for the purpose of explaining something that is true of both. This approach to Rom 9:25-26 certainly has its advantages. It strives to do justice to Hosea's prophecy in its context, and it also recognizes the apparent force of the context in Romans concerning the conversion of Gentiles. In addition, the

introductory formula, "even as it says in Hosea," fits well with an illustration or analogy and does not demand that it be the strict fulfilment of the prophecy.

PAUL'S USE OF THE OT IN ROM 9:25-26

In spite of its attraction, however, the argument for analogy has some drawbacks. For one thing, Paul normally interprets OT prophecies literally, as will be discussed later in this article. The few examples of his analogical use of scripture normally come from non-predictive portions (as Ps 19:4 in Rom 10:18, or Deut 25:4 in 1 Tim 5:18).

There remains a greater difficulty with this interpretation. The analogy between the ten tribes and the Gentiles breaks down at a critical point. Hodge mentioned that an analogy is appropriate for "all those whose character and circumstances are the same." Certainly one could identify the "character" of the idolatrous ten tribes with that of the Gentiles. Paul no doubt was amazed by God's mercy revealed both in God's promises for adulterous Israel and in his saving the heathen. But the "circumstances" of the two groups are quite different. Romans 1-2 describes the Gentiles' relation to God as founded upon creation and conscience, whereas Romans 2-3 describes the Jews' relation to God as also one of promise and covenant. The covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have placed even the unbelieving Jews in a unique position in the world (cf. Rom 11:24). It is because of these covenants that the OT predicts Israel's restoration (e.g., Lev 26:40-45; Deut 4:29-31). And Paul himself in Romans 9-11 stresses that this restoration stems from God's special mercy and covenant-faithfulness to Israel (Rom 9:4-6; 11:1-2, 11,24,28-29). In this major respect Paul does not view the present salvation of Gentiles as analogous to the promised future salvation of national Israel.

Identity of meaning

As quoted above, Charles Hodge¹¹ has said, "This difficulty is sometimes gotten over by giving a different view of the apostle's object in the citation, and making it refer to the restoration of the Jews." Actually, very few commentators have proposed this solution; as Hodge went on to say, "This interpretation is

¹¹ **Charles Hodge** (December 27, 1797 – June 19, 1878) was an important Presbyterian theologian and principal of Princeton Theological Seminary between 1851 and 1878. He was a leading exponent of the Princeton theology, an orthodox Calvinist theological tradition in America during the 19th century. He argued strongly for the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Many of his ideas were adopted in the 20th century by Fundamentalists and Evangelicals.

obviously at variance with the context," Nevertheless, one who has ventured this approach is Alva J. McClain, who says in his popular commentary:

A lot of folks think that this passage refers to the Gentiles. It does not. They think Paul made a mistake and quoted from the Old Testament something that belonged to Jews and applied it to the Gentiles. He is talking about Israel. "I will call her my people which was not my people." God cast Israel off and then picked her up in mercy.

Unfortunately, the brief and popular style of McClain's book prevents a clarification and defence of this statement. Its major difficulty, as Hodge has noted, is the context in Romans 9, which seems to be speaking about the present, largely Gentile church. Yet this approach has the distinct asset of taking Hosea's prophecy at face value and maintaining complete harmony between Hosea and Paul. This writer believes that the context in Romans 9 can, and indeed does, fit together best with this interpretation. Before proceeding to defend this approach, it would be good to note another variation of it. Some commentators believe that Paul used Hosea in the original sense, but that the original sense of Hosea included the salvation of Gentiles. George N. H. Peters, on one hand, sees believing Gentiles as incorporated into the Israel of prophecy. While Romans 11 certainly supports this approach, it seems that the contexts of Romans 9 and of Hosea 1-2 refer more directly to national Israel-largely unbelieving. On the other hand, several writers have seen the Gentile conversion already foretold in Hosea itself, from the standpoint of OT exegesis. William Kelly sees Gentile salvation in Hos 1:10, on the analogy of Isa 65:1-2. J. Barton Payne notes that, in the OT, "believing Gentiles may be identified simply as Israelites, inseparable from God's people," citing Isa 44:5; 56:3, along with Hos 1:10; 2:23. The view of Kelly and Payne agrees with OT exegesis and theology, but seems out of harmony with the context of Hosea, where the woman who was restored is the *same* woman who was married and who went astray-i.e., national Israel. Also, as will be seen, Paul's quotations need not be construed as referring to Gentile conversions in Paul's day.

NATIONAL ISRAEL IN ROMANS 9:25-26

This does not claim to prove dogmatically that Paul is referring to national Israel in these quotations; but he would claim that this interpretation is a viable option which deserves serious consideration. Several weighty arguments favour a literal use of prophecy in these verses.

PAUL'S USE OF THE OT IN ROM 9:25-26

Paul's normal hermeneutics

Recently Paul's epistles have been subjected to increased study, especially since the advent of the Qumran literature. In general, it now is thought that Paul's hermeneutics resembles that of Palestinian much more than that of Hellenistic Judaism. Richard Longenecker¹² has put it this way: Midrashic exegetical methods are prominent in the Pauline letters. In fact, it is midrashic exegesis¹³ more than pesher or allegorical exegesis that characterizes the apostle's hermeneutical procedures. Longenecker would not conclude that Paul never "Christianizes" the O.T, yet for him Paul's starting-point is midrashic exegesis. In the majority of his Old Testament citations, Paul adheres to the original sense of the passage. Or, if he extends it, it is possible to understand his rationale if we grant him the Jewish presuppositions of "corporate solidarity" and "historical correspondences" and the Christian presuppositions of "eschatological fulfilment" and "messianic presence."

Those who favour the spiritualizing approach in Rom 9:25-26 will say that here Paul uses the Christian presupposition of "eschatological fulfilment," while those who favor the argument from analogy might say he is using the Jewish presupposition of "historical correspondences." On the other hand, his usual method is to "adhere to the original sense of the passage"-in this case, seeing Israel as the object of these passages. Within midrashic exegesis there is a

¹² **Richard N. Longenecker** is a prominent New Testament scholar. For many years he taught at Wycliffe College in the University of Toronto. He was Distinguished Professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. He is now retired. His education includes B.A. and M.A. degrees from Wheaton College, and a Ph.D. from New College in the University of Edinburgh. He was also honoured with a D.D. from Wycliffe College. Longenecker is the author of numerous books and over fifty published articles in scholarly and professional journals. He is completing a major commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, to be published by Eerdmans in the "New International Greek Testament Commentary" series.

¹³ In Judaism, the *Midrash* (/ˈmidraʃ/; Hebrew: שָׁרֶת; plural *midrashim*) is the body of exegesis of Torah texts along with homiletic stories as taught by Chazal (Rabbinical Jewish sages of the post-Temple era) that provide an intrinsic analysis to passages in the Tanakh. Midrash is a method of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal, or moral teachings. It fills in gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at.^[2] The purpose of midrash was to resolve problems in the interpretation of difficult passages of the text of the Hebrew Bible, using Rabbinic principles of hermeneutics and philology to align them with the religious and ethical values of religious teachers.

variety of possible interpretations. The so-called seven rules of Hillel would allow one to interpret the OT as an analogy (Rule 5, "general and particular": a particular rule may be expanded into a general principle), as well as with the R. N. Longenecker. *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 125-26. Longenecker effectively argues with E. E. Ellis and others, showing that there are very few if any real examples of allegorical or pesher exegesis in Paul's epistles (118-32).

"Grammatical-historical" method (e.g., Rule 7, "context": the meaning is established by its context). In this regard, it should be noted that Paul often cites the OT with its own context in view (e.g., Rom 4:3,9- 11; 9:7-9; 15:12). Such an approach in Rom 9:25-26, if not otherwise ruled out by context, would be in harmony with Paul's normal exegesis of the OT.

Background of the quotations

Paul's argument throughout Romans 9 is built on the OT. In vv 6-13 Paul draws from Genesis and Malachi to trace out God's election of Israel in history. In vv 14-18 he selects two passages from Exodus to demonstrate the sovereignty of that election and the role of the non-elect in relation to the elect in God's program. In the rest of the chapter Paul quotes several times from the prophets Isaiah and Hosea, with perhaps an allusion to Jeremiah, to show the results of this election for Israel's history and future. The remarkable thing about these quotations from the prophets is that, with the one exception of Isa 45:9, every quotation comes from the same period in Israel's history-the time of impending Assyrian conquest. This conquest came in three major stages: Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C., Shalmaneser V and Sargon II in 722 B.C. These quotations are charted below:

Verse in Romans 9 passage quoted:

- 20 Isa 29:16; 45:9
- 25 Hos 2:23
- 26 Hos 1:10
- 27-28 Isa 10:22-23
- 29 Isa 1:9
- 33 Isa 8:14; 28:16

It is more significant that in each case the Assyrian judgment of Israel is the subject of the prophecy. Even in the case of v 20, Isa 29:16 appears to be looking forward to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Throughout all these prophecies runs the same theme: Israel rebels against the Lord; God raises up Assyria as his weapon to judge Israel; God preserves a remnant of Israel;

God destroys Assyria for its pride; God restores Israel to repentance and blessing. For example, the passages quoted in vv 25-26 and 27-29 follow this pattern in their Conservatives usually date the writing of Isaiah 40-66 between 701 and 686 B.C.

PAUL'S USE OF THE OT IN ROMANS 9:25-26:

Own context; note especially Hos 1:6-11; 2:9-14, 19-23; 3:4-5; Isa 1:5-9; 5:20-30; 7:17-20; 8:4; 10:5-27. With this background in view, it appears that the quotations in Rom 9:25-29 are describing the same phenomenon: the present but temporary status of Israel as a people largely unbelieving, disenfranchised, and under judgment by foreign nations. In this light vv 25-26 emphasize neither Israel's future restoration nor the Gentiles' place in the church, but rather the prophetic forecast of Israel's present state in God's program—"not having received mercy," "not my people." Similarly, the quotations in v 33 fit beautifully with Paul's intention. In Isaiah 8 Judah falls before Assyria; in Isaiah 28 it is the northern kingdom of Israel which falls; in both cases Paul sees the same principle, which is still at work in his nation. Israel fell into her present state because she trusted in her own plots and schemes, rather than in God's mercy and deliverance (Isa 8:6, 12; 28:15). For this reason God judged her by means of Assyria (Isa 8:7-8, 14-15; 28:16- 17). Israel failed to have true faith in God and his promises (Isa 8:6, 13, 16-17; 28:16-19). Not only in Rom 9:25-26, but throughout the chapter the OT context provides valuable direction in elucidating Paul's meaning.

"Vessels of wrath" as Israel's oppressors

It is often assumed that the "vessels of wrath" in v 22 are the unbelieving Jews as in vv 6 and 31, while the "vessels of mercy" in v 23 are believers in the church. While v 24 does include believing Jews and Gentiles among the "vessels of mercy," one should not jump to the conclusion that the rest of the Jews are the "vessels of wrath." While Paul certainly considered individual unbelieving Jews as recipients of God's wrath and judgment (e.g. 1 Thess 2:14-16), he held a more optimistic view of his nation's future as a whole. (Rom 11:11, 15, 23-24, 26-29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:16).

Yet there is another way to understand this designation, one which is in harmony with the immediate context and suggested by the OT usage. It is suggested that "vessels of wrath" in v 22 is Paul's designation for the heathen nations God uses to judge Israel. The preceding context in vv 17-21 lends weight to this identification. To defend the sovereignty of God's election, Paul takes the example of Pharaoh. Quoting Exod 9:16, Paul shows that God ordained

Pharaoh's power and his stubborn resistance in order to glorify his own greater power in the deliverance of Israel. The context of Exodus justifies Paul's approach (Exodus 3:19-20; 4:21; 7:3-5, 13-14, 22-23; 8:15, 32; 9:7, 12, 16, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4-5, 8, 17-18, 30-31). And indeed, God was glorified in Pharaoh's final defeat (cf. Moses' song in Exodus 15:1-19). But the Egyptian oppression and deliverance also had its purposes in Israel's history and development: a family went down into Egypt; a nation came out of Egypt, a nation redeemed from bondage by the Lord. Pharaoh was a "vessel of wrath," an instrument used to oppress Israel for a time, and yet himself the final recipient of God's wrath in judgment.

The immediate context of vv 22-24 also favors this understanding. There is only one independent verb in this sentence: "What if ...God *bore* with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" Several clauses modify this main verb: "desiring to show his wrath," "[desiring] to make known his power," "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy. ..." Note that these three purposes, to show his wrath, power, and riches of glory, are met by the single action of the verb. If the "vessels of wrath" are the unbelieving Jews, it is difficult to account for the expression Paul uses: God *bears with much longsuffering* unbelieving Jews, who are fitted for destruction. How does this patience toward the Jews display God's wrath and power? Would not it be better to say: he *judges, punishes, or oppresses* vessels of wrath? On the other hand, if Israel's oppressors are the "vessels of wrath," the statement makes perfect sense: God *bears with much longsuffering* heathen, godless nations, by allowing them to rule over Israel and the world, in order that he might use them as instruments to convey his wrath and power against unbelieving Israel, and in the end his glory and mercy to repentant Israel (along with believing Gentiles), when he destroys those wicked nations. In other words, these verses would equate God's longsuffering toward "vessels of wrath" with the state of Gentile supremacy over Israel, beginning in O.T times and continuing intermittently into Paul's day. Finally, the following context of vv 25-33 supports the identity of the "vessels of wrath" as Israel's oppressors. As seen above, all these quotations refer back to the Assyrian oppression in the second half of the eighth century. In many ways Assyria was a "vessel" of the Lord.

The term "vessel" in the Greek NT and in the LXX is **skeu?oj** (in the LXX it normally represents *yliK;*), a word which designates not only dishes and household utensils,, but a great variety of implements, including weapons (e.g., Deut 1:41; Judg 18:11). In Isa 13:5 the Medes are God's weapons to destroy Babylon; here the same Hebrew term *yliK;* is translated in the LXX by the related word **o!plon**, "weapon." It is striking that Paul quotes Isa 10:22-23,

which occurs in See the discussion of LXX usage in C. Maurer, "skeu?oj" TDNT 7 (1971) pages 359-60.

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The very context of a lengthy passage describing Assyria as God's weapon against Israel (Isa 10:5-34). In this passage Assyria is called "the rod of my anger," "the club of my wrath," "the ax," "the saw" (vv 5, 15, NIV). Assyria's career is described as follows: God is gracious to Assyria and uses it to punish Israel (vv 5-6, 23), Assyria becomes proud against God (vv 7-14), God destroys Assyria (vv 5, 12, 15-19, 24-34), Israel is blessed with victory and deliverance (vv 17-23). This pattern fits exactly with that of Rom 9:22-God's patience towards vessels of wrath used to display God's judgment and then his merciful deliverance of his people.

It might be tempting at this point to interpret "vessels of wrath" in Rom 9:22 as "vessels which bring wrath." "Of wrath" is certainly a genitive of quality, "vessels characterized by wrath," but in Paul's context the thought predominates that these vessels will *receive* God's wrath, just as the "vessels of mercy" will receive his mercy. So it is best to take this designation as referring to the planned destruction of these vessels (cf. "son of destruction" in 2 Thess 2:3). This is the same emphasis found concerning Assyria in Isaiah 10.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

In view of the evidence presented to support national Israel as the object of Rom 9:25-26, the six arguments mentioned earlier favouring a Gentile application can be answered adequately.

1) Paul's mention of Gentile believers in v 24 does not contradict the interpretation suggested here. Paul obviously includes them among God's "vessels of mercy" and often states that they will share in the blessings promised to Israel (Rom 11:17-20; Gal 3:14; Eph 2:11-13, 19; 3:6; cf. Matt 21:43). The question is the proper reference of the prophecy in vv 25-26. Since the word "Gentiles" appears immediately before the citation, many assume that Paul sees some reference to Gentiles in this prophecy. But the whole sentence in which the citation is found begins at v 22, and the main clause is, "What if God endured the vessels of wrath?" This interpretation would link the prophecy to the main clause of the sentence. It appears to this writer that Paul invokes Hosea's prophecies not to prove large-scale Gentile conversions, but to prove the temporary but very real nature of Israel's period of unbelief and disenfranchisement prior to her final restoration. The prophecies cited in vv 27-

29 continue that theme, while the nature of Gentile belief, introduced by Paul in v 24, is picked up in v 30.

- 2) The “**de**” in v 27 is not a strong adversative and certainly does not demand a change of subject. The NIV leaves it untranslated. If there is any contrast indicated, it is simply between two different aspects of Israel’s judgment.
- 3) I Pet 2:10 was addressed primarily to Jewish believers I Pet 1:1; Gal 2:9); and in any case, all recognize that only true believers can ever be members of God’s promised kingdom (John 3:3).
- 4) The argument concerning “vessels of wrath” is expanded in the previous section.
- 5) All three quotations in Rom 10:19-21 (quoting Deut 32:21; Isa 65:1-2) prove the same point: God revealed himself more than sufficiently to Israel, so that she is without excuse. The occurrences of “**de**” in vv 20, 21 are again not strongly adversative. The “non-nation” in v 19 is, according to Deuteronomy, one of Israel’s oppressors, and is favoured by God only in this: he gives the “non-nation” power to oppress Israel before he destroys it (Deut 32:27, 36-43). The oppression by these nations is another way God sought to reveal his will to Israel and bring her to repentance. V 20 emphasizes God’s continuing to reveal himself to Israel, even as she refused to seek him, and v 21 continues the quotation, emphasizing the continuing nature of this revelation and invitation.
- 6) In Rom 10:19 Paul speaks of Israel’s jealousy being aroused because of Gentile supremacy in the world (cf. Rom 9:22-24); with a play on words in Rom 11:11, 14, Paul seeks the same reaction by announcing Gentile supremacy in the church. Obviously, the believing Gentiles of Romans 11 are not the oppressing powers of Deut 32:21 and Rom 10:19; but in this dispensation, the two coincide in time. The “times of the Gentiles,” in contrast to the OT period and the future millennial kingdom, witness Gentile supremacy in both the world and the church (Luke 21:24; Rom 11:25). The OT does have relevance for Paul’s entire argument: it provides proof that, before Israel’s restoration, she will experience a period of widespread unbelief, disenfranchisement, and subjugation to Gentile power, but that through these trials, and by means of them, God will bring her to repentance and restoration, thus fulfilling the covenants and promises (Rom 11:26, “*in this manner* all Israel will be saved”). Paul thus defines God’s unchangeable election (Rom 9:6; 11:1,28-29), defines his own ministry as it relates to that election (Rom 11: 13-32), and declares the wondrous way God reveals his various attributes in this circuitous route leading to Israel’s final salvation (Rom 9:11, 14-17, 22-23; 11:22, 32-36).

PAUL'S USE OF THE O.T IN ROMANS 9:25-26

With this understanding of Paul's argument, one could expand and paraphrase Rom 9:22-26 as follows:

What if God exercises his sovereignty over Israel by permitting godless Gentile nations to rule over the earth-nations he ultimately will destroy? God is patient with these nations in order to use them as instruments to deal with his own people. As they oppress Israel, God is revealing his wrath and power against her; and as God will later destroy them and deliver his people, granting them repentance and restoration, he will thereby reveal the riches of his glory to that nation. Yes, Israel has been prepared by God to experience his mercy and share his glory, but this blessing will come only to those Israelites who repent and believe in him. For the present only some are believers, who, along with believing Gentiles, will share in these blessings. But most of the nation is still in rebellion and under God's displeasure and judgment; their restoration as a nation is still in the future; as it says in Hosea, "I will call them my people who were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved; and where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called sons of the living God."

This interpretation of Rom 9:25-26 maintains a consistent hermeneutic for the OT and NT and fits very well with Paul's exact terminology and development of argument in Romans 9-11.

First Letter to the Corinthians – Message for this Century

The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians is a very, very important letter for us because it so thoroughly captures the problems that we face as moderns living in this modern age. The reason is, of course, that Corinth was the most European city in the New Testament -- it was a resort city, the capital of selfishness and pleasure in the Roman Empire, as you think of Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Berlin under many others .

If you remember your geography you know it was located on the Peloponnesian peninsula, and the conditions under which the Corinthians lived were very much like the conditions under which we live, or to put that the other way, the conditions under which we live today are Corinthian conditions. Corinth was a beautiful city, a lovely city of palms and beautiful buildings, the center of pleasure for the whole empire, and it was devoted to two things -- the pursuit of pleasure (largely passion), and of wisdom. It was a Greek city, and its

inhabitants loved to philosophize, and they were given to what Paul calls, "the wisdom of words."

So the two major forces that were active in this city, creating the atmosphere in which the Corinthian church had to live, were these: intellectualism and sensualism. This was a city devoted to the worship of the goddess sex. That is why I speak of it as so like modern conditions today. In the city of Corinth there was a temple that was dedicated to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, and part of the worship of the Greek goddess was the performance of certain religious ceremonies that involved sexual relationships; therefore, the priestesses of this temple were really prostitutes, and there were some 10,000 of them attached to the temple. The city was openly given over to the practices of licentiousness; it was regarded as a normal, proper part of life and no one ever thought twice about it. If we think we are living under conditions where sensualism is rampant and worship of sex is widespread, these conditions do not yet approach those of the Christians who had to live in Corinth.

Furthermore, they were continually assaulted by the doctrines, dogmas and ideas of men following the great philosophers. This city was the heir of the great thinkers of the Golden Age of Greece -- Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all had their followers within the city of Corinth. And as in every Greek city, they loved to gather in the public plazas and debate these issues endlessly. They were people given over to the love of wisdom.

Now into this city comes the Apostle Paul. You remember the story from the book of Acts; he had come down through Thessalonica and had been driven out of that city by an uprising of the Jews against him, had gone for a brief time to the little city of Berea and then had come down into Athens. There in Athens, as he walked about the city alone, he noted the many temples and was finally taken up to preach to the Athenians on Mars Hill. When he left Athens at last, he came down across the little isthmus into Corinth. There he stayed for a period of about a year and a half to two years, preaching the gospel and making tents for a living.

He had found a couple who had come from Rome, named Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tent makers, and he stayed with them and led them to Christ. He formed a church in their home and gradually the gospel spread throughout the city and many of the Corinthians on hearing it, we are told, believed, and were baptized and became members of this church.

That was the church to which Paul wrote this letter, and as you read it, you see that it was a church in trouble; it was the biggest problem church in the New

Testament. But although there were a great many things wrong about it, there were some things that were right, too. As Paul began his letter to them, he recognizes some of these things that are right. First, he calls them "saints," he says,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. (1 Corinthians 1:2a RSV)

Then, his eyes lift to the horizon of both geography and time, and he sees even us and he says,

...together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2b RSV)

and then his usual greeting,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1: 3 RSV)

Then the apostle begins to talk about some of the things that made these people Christians -- the great themes of our Christian faith. He mentions the fact that they had received Christ by faith, and, by grace, had entered into a new life, and had been enriched by him. And there was also much for which he could commend this church in the opening verses of this letter; but he soon comes to what is the key to the entire letter. If you never remember anything else of First Corinthians, at least remember this verse, because everything in this letter is built around it:

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1: 9 RSV)

There is the central thing in the Christian life -- we are called to share the life of the Son of God. That is what fellowship is -- it is sharing. Fellowship with anyone is sharing time, and this is what God has called us to. Paul puts that first in this letter to call the attention of these Christians to what was lacking in their experience, and everything in the letter gathers about this verse.

The letter falls into two major divisions; there is first of all a great section dealing with what we might call "the carnalities," that takes you from chapter one through chapter eleven. Then there is a closing section from chapter twelve through chapter sixteen that deals with what Paul himself calls "the spiritualities" -- the carnalities versus the spiritualities. The carnalities included everything that was wrong with this church; the spiritualities were what they

needed to correct it. As you read this letter through, you will see that we suffer today from all the carnalities, in principle at least, and that what we desperately need to set our lives right are the spiritualities. Therefore, this letter is especially written to those who live in a sex-saturated, wisdom-loving atmosphere and are trying to live as Christians in the midst of all the pressures that constantly come from these two areas.

In the first section, speaking to the church in trouble, there are three major areas that Paul deals with. There is first of all the problem of divisions; then there was the problem of scandals in the church; and, finally, he took up certain matters they had written to him about -- questions that were troubling them. And all these are brought together under the major heading, "the carnalities," the things that were troubling the church.

The first problem, this matter of divisions, was caused by the fact that the spirit of the city had come into the church. There are those who are telling us that the need in the church today is to capture again the spirit of the age in which we live. There could be absolutely nothing further from the truth than that! The one thing the church must never do is to capture the spirit of the age. The job of the church is to correct the spirit of the age. When a church begins to reflect the spirit of the age in which it lives, it immediately loses its power, and that is what had happened to the church at Corinth.

They were allowing all these divisions over the philosophies of men to come into the church, and they had chosen certain religious leaders around whom they were gathering in little factions, saying that so-and-so was better than so-and-so, and the insights of this man were better than that man. They were forming little sects and cliques and schisms within the church. These divisions were largely built around certain insights they felt each man contributed, and Paul mentions certain names here to indicate what he means; some were following Peter, some Apollos, some were gathering about his name, Paul. And then there was an exclusive little group who said they were the purest of all; they said they were following Christ, and Christ only -- and they were the worst troublemakers of all. But the problem was, that they were each thinking that their leader's special bit of insight represented a superior view. And they were doing exactly what the people out in the city were doing, dividing up over the views of men.

Now Paul answers this with a tremendous word in which he shows that the wisdom of men is of no avail. He sets it aside completely, and he says that in the church these insights of men are always partial and untrustworthy to a great degree, and that the Corinthians will never learn anything until they give themselves to the wisdom of God. "The world," Paul says, "By wisdom does not

know God" (1 Corinthians 1:21 RSV), and they will never get to the heart of their problems by trying to pursue the insights of current popularity or secular philosophers.

Now that is still true today. The church will never solve its problems as long as it constantly pursues this writer and that writer, this man and that speaker, thinking that it will gather from the efforts and knowledge of men the insights it needs to understand its problems. The apostle says it is impossible that we can ever arrive at a solution to our needs on this level, because there is something vitally missing. That missing element is the life of the Spirit in man, and without this, he can never solve all the riddles of life. So the apostle answers these schisms and factions and divisions by confronting them with the word of the cross -- the word that presents the cross the Christ as that instrument by which God cuts off all human wisdom, not as being worthless in its own narrow realm, but as being useless in solving the major problems of man.

When we understand this, we realize that we will never begin to learn until we first learn that we do not know anything. When we come to appreciate the word of the cross, we understand that in the cross of Jesus Christ, God took his own Son, now become man like us, identified with us in every way, and nailed him up to die as being useless as far as solving any of the problems of mankind is concerned. That is the word of the cross; that is why it looks so foolish to the natural man; that is why it proceeds on a totally different principle than the wisdom of the world. And when we accept that, the apostle says, we begin to discover that true, secret, hidden wisdom that unfolds little by little the answers to the problems of life. We begin to understand ourselves and to see why this world is what it is, and where it is heading, and why all the confusion and the difficulties and the problems exist, as the deep things of God, the wisdom which God has hidden in Christ, is unfolded to us through the teaching of the Spirit by the word of God. It is a wonderful section.

And Paul says, "I'm not going to waste any time at all arguing with you about Socrates or Plato or Aristotle, or any other wisdom of men: they have their place, but when it comes to solving the deep-seated problems of human nature, there is only one wisdom that can touch it, and that is the word of the cross." This becomes, then, one of the mightiest answers of all time to the intellectualism that constantly hounds the Christian church and attempts to undermine it -- a false intellectualism. I mean, by that, that the word of God never attempts to set aside or call worthless the pursuit of knowledge. God intends men to learn things, he designed us that way, but it must be knowledge based upon a right beginning and we are called back to the principle set forth in

the Old Testament, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10a RSV); that is where we begin.

Now, Paul goes on here to show that the true reason for their division was not what they thought it to be -- differences of human points of view -- but rather, it was carnality, the love of the flesh for being puffed up, and for finding itself idolized and followed. This was their problem. Paul says that while that principle is at work, they would remain babes, they would never grow. The word of the cross must come in and cut off the flesh before you will ever begin to grow. As long as this keeps on, you will find yourselves constantly involved in little squabbles and bickerings and divisions, and you can live your whole Christian life on that basis, Paul says.

But one of these days you are going to come to the end, and the testing, the analysis of what your life has been worth, and in that day you will see that if you have been living in the flesh, it is all wood, hay, and stubble. It is burned up, completely worthless, and your life -- except for the fact that you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior -- is a wasted enterprise. It is possible, even in the religious realm, to gain the approval of men and to be accepted as quite a figure in the church, and to enjoy the favor of others and the prestige that comes from position, and to come to the end, only to discover that the absolutely relentless judgment of God has not been impressed in the least degree by that which originates from anything else but the work of the Spirit of God in you -- it has to be the Spirit and not the flesh.

Now Paul turns to the matter of the scandals that were occurring in this church. These were, of course, the effects of the divisions. There was first of all an intolerable case of sexual immorality in the church that was being openly regarded with a considerable degree of acceptance and toleration, and he says, "this is absolutely wrong; you must deal with this." Whenever sin breaks out openly like this, and it is not repented of, then the church must act in discipline, and he scolds these leaders for not moving to bring this before the judging of the church and to set aside this iniquity that was eating away at their ranks.

Here is another similarity to the church today. It is almost frightening to see how certain leaders of the church are now openly advocating sexual immoralities, and certain of the pastors and leaders of youth groups in the church are openly encouraging young people to sleep together, and to live together. Now, at the time this letter was written, the atmosphere was such that sexual immorality was widely accepted within the city as the normal way of life. Within the church, however, it is absolutely set aside as being totally incongruous with the Christian profession, because it was a violation of the humanity of the

individuals involved. The love of God burned in zealous judgment against this because it was destroying and would destroy those involved in it. That is why the apostle speaks in such scathing words concerning this matter. Chapters five and six both deal with this matter of immorality, and the apostle points out that the defense of the Christian must not be derived from any moral standards outside himself -- it is not "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" that keeps young people or older people free from sexual problems and pressures, but rather it is the recognition that their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. The Son of God himself dwells in us, and we are never out of his presence. Everywhere we go, he goes with us, and is in us, and, in that sense, everything we are doing is done in the presence of the Son of God himself. That is what keeps the young person free from the pressures that come.

Then, beginning with chapter seven, Paul turns to the questions they had written to him,

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. (1 Corinthians 7:1a RSV)

And they wrote about four major problems. First, there was a question about marriage; they asked Paul if it was right to be married, in view of the pressures that were around them, if perhaps they should give themselves to the service of God in an ascetic life. Although Paul himself was not married, nevertheless he told them in this section that it is best, it is good for men and women to be married, that marriage is a perfectly proper way of life, and because of the temptation to immorality, he says, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband; that was in view of the Corinthian conditions.

Then he shows them that it is also right to have a single life, if God grants this as a special calling to any individual -- this is a perfectly honorable way of life. Marriage is not a necessity, though it often is an advantage, and yet it can be a problem. Paul deals very thoughtfully, helpfully, and carefully with this whole question of marriage.

Then they wrote to him about three things that were troubling them; largely in the church at Corinth. First, they were worried about offending God, and about offending the conscience of the weaker brother, in the matter of eating meat that was offered to idols. Although we are no longer troubled by the problem of whether we ought to eat meat offered to idols or not, nevertheless in this section, we are confronting in principle this whole thorny issue of Christian taboos -- smoking, drinking, dancing, everything that has ever been brought up as a

problem within the church that is not specifically identified as an evil in the Scriptures. What do you do about it?

It is most interesting that Paul was an apostle, with all the authority of an apostle, but he absolutely refused to make up any rules along this line. This is because the weak, immature Christian always wants somebody to put him under law, but if you put a Christian under law, then he is no longer under grace! And Paul knows that Christians must learn to deal with what he calls "the law of liberty." The fact is that all things are right; nothing is wrong in itself: the devil never made any of the capabilities and capacities that are in the human being -- God made them all. And no urge or desire, or tendency is wrong in itself -- we are at liberty in these things.

But with this law, he links two other laws. One he calls the "law of love;" that is the law that says, "I may be free to do it, but if I am really putting a stumbling block in somebody else's path, I won't do it" -- that is the law of love. The limitation is imposed not by my conscience, but by another's conscience. The other is the "law of expediency;" that is, everything is legal, is lawful, but not everything is helpful. There are a lot of things I could do, and many directions I could go, as a Christian, but if I spend all my time doing all the things I am free to do, I no longer have any time to do the things which I am called to do, and therefore, it is not always helpful. These things can be a waste of time and drag us back, even though they are not wrong in themselves. That is what Hebrews calls the "weights;" as the writer says, "... lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..." (Hebrews12:1b RSV).

Then, they wrote also about women -- women were a problem in the church at Corinth, too. (I did not mean anything bad by that!) But they were, because they were involved with a very difficult problem about hats. Now this had peculiar local overtones about it -- if a woman was seen bare-headed in Corinth, she was immediately identified as a prostitute, one of the temple priestess, and that is why Paul writes to these people in Corinth and says, "You ladies, when you come to church, put a hat on; it is a sign that you are a Christian woman subject to your husband."

Now in practice that applied to Corinth; in principle (the principle applies all the time), Christian women are to be in subjection to their husbands -- as you see all through the Scriptures -- in every way, as an indication and a sign that the church is in subjection to its Lord. The Christian woman fulfills her ministry to her Lord in being subject to her husband, and all this is involved in this problem of headship which the apostle defines as equality, cooperation, and yet, submission.

Then the third problem concerned the Lord's table; there were certain ones who were eating this in a mechanical, perfunctory way, not seeing any meaning of having any insight into what they were doing, and so the apostle had to show them that everything the Christian does must be done realistically and with a recognition that it is done as unto the Lord.

Now in chapter twelve through the rest of the book, he is dealing with the great spiritualities, the correction to these carnalities. You do not correct these things by just trying to straighten yourself out. How do you correct them? Well first, by a recognition of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. That is why chapter twelve begins with that very word.

Now concerning spiritualities[it is translated "spiritual gifts" here, but it is actually one word], brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. (1 Corinthians 12:1 RSV¹⁴)

Why not? Well, because this is what makes life work, and he goes on to explain that it is the presence of the Spirit that makes Christ real to us, and the gifts of the Spirit that are designed to make the body function and reach out and perform its work of touching society on every side.

Here again, we have missed so much of the great richness of the provision of Christ for his church. We know so little about the gifts of the Spirit. What is your gift -- do you know? And are you using it? Are you putting it to work? Or do you need Paul's admonition to Timothy, "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Timothy 1:6b RSV). The body functions by the exercise of its gift, and every Christian has a gift -- at least one -- and there are different gifts; we do not all have the same.

God has sent different gifts within the body, and we all function as these gifts are put to work; therefore, this is a beautiful chapter -- showing us that we must not despise another because of a different gift. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' " (1 Corinthians 12:21a RSV), nor must we neglect the gift that has been given to us; it is all necessary -- even the head cannot properly operate without the foot. Think of that -- the head is Christ himself, and yet we are all members one of another, and so, as the body of Christ, we fulfill our functions -- both in the church to the body itself and to the world -- through the exercise of spiritual gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the proof that we have learned the secret will be as set forth in chapter thirteen. You know what

¹⁴ Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

that is -- love -- the manifestation of love. This is a wonderful chapter, because it sets forth for us the value of love, the portrait of love, and the power of love.

Then in chapter fourteen, Paul takes up another problem that was causing confusion in the church -- the misuse of one of the gifts, the gift of tongues, and the presence of the false gift of tongues that was at work in that church as it is in our society today. In the correction for these abuses, he tries to focus the whole weight of this section on the importance of the gift of prophecy. It is always amazing to me how many read this chapter and entirely miss the apostle's point.

The whole purpose of the chapter is that we start talking about the gift of prophecy and emphasizing it, and urging it upon others, and encouraging those who have it to exercise it. But you hardly ever hear anything about that: it is all tongues, is it not? Yet Paul was trying to play down the gift of tongues, and play up the gift of prophecy. Now, the gift of prophecy is simply the ability to explain and expound the Scriptures, to speak comfort and edification, and encouragement from the Scriptures.

That brings us to chapter fifteen with its great emphasis on the resurrection. What would any of these things be worth if we did not have a living Christ to make them real? The resurrection is the great pivot for the whole of the Christian faith -- everything comes back to that. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, then, as the apostle says in this chapter, we are hopeless, and not only that, we are the most to be pitied of all people -- we are nuts, we are fools, we ought to be locked up somewhere, if Christ be not raised from the dead.

But what a triumphant paean of proof and praise is in this chapter concerning the resurrection. Paul closes it with what is his whole point. Everything in this whole letter comes right down to this one verse (verse 58):

Therefore,[because of all he has said up to this point] my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58 RSV)

Chapter sixteen is just a postscript in which he catches up certain little things that the church needed to know, very important to us, but then he comes back to this theme again:

Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong, Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 RSV)

And you have got the equipment to do it with. Now do it.

Love and Prophecy

Why does Paul compare love to prophecy? He points out prophecy will become useless, but love will last forever!

1 Corinthians 13:7-10 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (8) Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! (9) Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! (10) But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.

When I listen to modern day prophets I can hardly believe a word they say. They use techniques to try and establish themselves as experts in prophecy, which in fact takes glory away from God. I am not surprised to see most of what they claim cannot be proved by the Bible.

What Paul says makes perfect sense. “Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!” This is something we have to learn to accept. We will only know what God decides we need to know. Paul adds one more interesting statement. “But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.” When I look at this statement I can see Jesus standing on one side of the temple court teaching His followers. On the other side of the court all the religious leaders gather to plot His death. For generations these religious factions remained divided, but joined forces to plot Jesus death. Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and those who supported Herod stood together against Jesus. Each had their own interpretations of the prophecies and they were all wrong. When Paul says, “when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.” Is he telling us all the prophecies today are wrong? Or is Paul telling us, when we finally understand God’s love, prophecy will be little or no concern? What does God say about this?

Deuteronomy 5:10 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

Interesting. God places His promise of love in His ten commandments. What is even more interesting is the commandment which follows.

Deuteronomy 5:11 "You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.

Would misusing God's name include falsely claiming the gift of prophecy? What did some of God's prophets say about loving God?

Psalms 17:6-8 I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God. Bend down and listen as I pray. (7) Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways. By your mighty power you rescue those who seek refuge from their enemies. (8) Guard me as you would guard your own eyes. Hide me in the shadow of your wings.

Proverbs 8:17 "I love all who love me. Those who search will surely find me.

Daniel 9:2-4 During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, learned from reading the word of the LORD, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. (3) So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes. (4) I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.

David knew God would always look over and protect him. He knew his safety depended on God. His son Solomon knew everyone searching for God would find what they needed. When Daniel was shown the meaning of Jeremiah's seventy year prophecy, He prayed to God, thanking Him for His unfailing love. These prophets saw the connection between searching for and finding God's love and prophecy.

It makes sense. Why would God reveal His most guarded secrets to self made prophets who have decided to skip the step of searching and finding God's love? If they had, they would not be so obsessed with prophecy. There would be no doubt they were safe in God's hands. They would also know that safety is available to everyone who comes to Jesus. They would know a personal relationship with Jesus is the answer to all prophecy, leading to eternal life.

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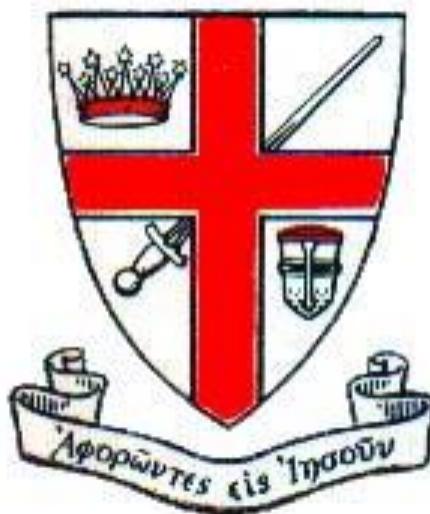
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